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NEVER DESPAIR





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NEVER DESPAIR.

A Tale,

IN ONE VOLUME.

BY

H. RICHARDSON CLERK.



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NEVER DESPAIR.

CHAPTER I.

"'Tis education forms the common mind,
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

POPE.

"It really is very annoying; I cannot conceive why Lady Norbury does not give me longer notice. It so happens that I have an engagement on the sixteenth, the day on which she tells me the school is to be examined, but I suppose I had better give it up; I am very sorry, though, to be obliged to do so, for it is of long standing."

With these words Mr. Leighton, the rector of Canondale, in Staffordshire, passed to his wife a letter which he had just received from Oakwood Park.

"It is annoying, I must confess," said Mrs. Leighton, when she laid down the letter. "Lady Norbury always forgets that you have a great many things to do in addition to your duties as rector of the parish. I have no doubt that she does not for a moment mean to slight you in any way, but that it is simply inadvertence on her part."

"I don't know whether she means to slight me or not, but this I do know, that it is excessively inconvenient. I had promised on that day to go over to Loughborough to see the churchwardens about a pew, the assignment of which has been made a matter of dispute, and which the Archdeacon has asked me to try to settle. Really I hardly know what to do. Perhaps if I were to write to Lady Norbury, to tell her the facts of the case, she might give me longer notice in future, but then in all probability she would be annoyed, and very likely say that I was neglecting the duties of my parish to run about the country doing other people's business."

“Yes, I do not think it would be wise in you to say you could not come to the school examination. It would be much better, in my opinion, to write to one of the churchwardens of Loughborough, explaining all the circumstances to him, and appointing another day. If you were not at the school examination it might give rise to a great deal of misrepresentation, and I do think it is very important that you should always be there to examine in Scripture.”

“I quite agree with you. I will do so. It would be most unwise I am sure for me to act in any way that might make people suppose I was touchy about the school. At the same time I do most heartily wish Lady Norbury would act differently. Sir Lionel always treats me as one gentleman should treat another, and I wish Lady Norbury would take a leaf out of his book.”

“Well, dear, I sometimes wish so too; but we cannot have all we want, and we must be content to take the rough with the smooth. I advise you to write to Lady Norbury at once,

saying you will be at the examination, and not referring at all to your previous engagement, for after all we ought to remember that parochial duties should come first, and extra-parochial occupy only the second place."

"Yes, that is quite true; but at the same time if Lady Norbury had just told me of the examination ten days ago, I should have appointed another day for Loughborough, and then parochial and extra-parochial work would not have clashed. If there is one thing more than another that I dislike, it is having to break an engagement. But it must be done, and so the sooner I get it off my mind the better."

And so, ere ten minutes had elapsed, a courteous note was dispatched to Lady Norbury, to the effect that Mr. Leighton would be very glad to be at the school examination on the day named, that he hoped the Government Inspector would be pleased with the progress of the children since the last examination, and that with kind regards he remained her's truly, B. LEIGHTON.

And that night's post carried a letter to the principal churchwarden of Loughborough, stating that a parochial engagement of which he had been unaware until that day, but which he could not postpone, would prevent Mr. Leighton from coming over to Loughborough as he had proposed on the sixteenth, but that he hoped the eighteenth would suit equally well, and that he was his very faithfully, B. LEIGHTON.

It can hardly be necessary to state the relationship which existed between Lady Norbury and Mr. Leighton, but a few details must be added to the knowledge which the reader will have already gained respecting some of the inhabitants of Canondale.

Mr. Leighton was the second son of a Devonshire squire, and had gone through the usual course of education which is considered most likely to qualify a man for whatever position in life he may be destined to fill. His father, having been at Eton himself, naturally sent his son thither, and after some five or six years spent

there with a thorough enjoyment of public school life, and with the unqualified testimony of his tutor to his uniformly good conduct, Baldwin Leighton matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford. His allowance from his father, though sufficient to enable him to live at Christ Church in perfect comfort, was not such as to make it desirable for him to live as expensively as some of his former companions. He found many old acquaintances on his arrival at college, and as there is a sort of freemasonry amongst old Etonians, a pleasant agreeable man, such as Baldwin Leighton undoubtedly was, would readily have been admitted into any set he might choose at Christ Church. But he had from his early childhood deliberately chosen the ministry of the Church as his future profession, and the fact that ere long he should enter into Holy Orders greatly influenced him in the choice of his companions at the university. Hence it was that Leighton's career at Oxford, though not brilliant, was thoroughly respectable. The Dean was loud in his praises of him,

and when at the end of three years his name appeared in the second class (for it was before the modern innovations had puzzled old college men), his father thanked God who had given him such a son.

A year or two more and Baldwin Leighton was ready to enter the ministry. His father was the patron of Canondale, and as Mr. Marsden, the rector of that place, was far advanced in years, there was every prospect of an early vacancy. It was arranged that he should enter upon a curacy in the same diocese as that in which his lot would afterwards be cast. The serving of a curacy with him was not such weary work as it is with many. In the first place, before he had been ordained many months, he married a lady to whom he had been for some time engaged. In the next place, his rector was a gentleman, and remembered that Mr. Leighton was one too, and in the last place he had every reason to expect that he would not remain very long in his then subordinate position, but would soon

enter upon his duties as rector of Canondale. In fact, however, some ten years passed before this event occurred, and then the ties which had bound him to his rector were not sundered without real regret on both sides.

At the time at which the present story opens Mr. Leighton had been at Canondale about eight years. Of three children two only were then living; Cecil, who was shortly about to go to Oxford, for matriculation at University College, and Marion, who was rejoicing in emancipation from the thralldom of the schoolroom. No pains had been spared in their education, for though Mr. Leighton's means were not more than sufficient for the many calls which were made upon him, yet he rightly felt that, if necessary, any sacrifice should be made so that his children should have the best education which it was possible to give them.

Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury, who lived at Oakwood Park, Canondale, were, each in their several spheres, persons of considerable import-

ance. Sir Lionel was great in magisterial and county business. Quarter sessions would have seemed tame and flat without his presence. He was one of the Visiting Justices of the county gaol, and the mainstay of the finance committee. He seemed never so happy as when busied in the voluminous accounts which it was necessary that some Curtius should wade through for the enlightenment thereon of his brother magistrates. Hence it was that Sir Lionel was a good deal called away from home, and home pursuits, and left many details of management in Lady Norbury's hands which might otherwise have come under his own personal supervision. Truth to say, however, Lady Norbury was well able to have undertaken duties even of a more onerous character than any which devolved upon her. She had been from early years left without a mother's care, and thrown thus in a great measure upon her own resources, her character had grown singularly self-reliant. Her fortune was an ample one, and many a claimant for

her hand had come forward ere twenty summers had passed over her head, but Miss Maltravers had no intention of giving her hand and fortune where she could not give her heart, and thus in turn each suitor retired from the contest, and the prize remained for some more fortunate competitor. Then it was that Sir Lionel entered the lists, and in him she found a nature congenial to her own. His personal appearance was very prepossessing, his character unexceptionable, his broad acres at Canondale a sufficient guarantee that mercenary motives at any rate had nothing to do with his coming forward as a suitor for Miss Maltravers' hand, and none were surprised when it began to be whispered at county meetings, at the quarter sessions, and in the hunting field that Sir Lionel Norbury had been successful where so many before him had failed, and that Miss Maltravers had consented to become the wife of Sir Lionel, and the presiding genius of Oakwood Park.

Fully competent she was to enter upon the



duties which now devolved upon her, and well did she become the character of the Lady Bountiful. A happy thing indeed it was for Canondale when Lady Norbury entered the place. The rector had been appointed to the living some thirty years before, and although at the time of his appointment he was considered to be an active and fairly energetic clergyman, yet during his incumbency the times had changed, and if the truth must be told, he had long been stranded high and dry. His sermons were thoroughly orthodox—no heresy lay latent there—but they were innocent of the faintest tinge of that earnestness and (no other word expresses it so well) unction which one would suppose that a dying man speaking to dying men on the unspeakably important affairs of their souls must necessarily feel. The self-righteous Pharisee left the church Sunday after Sunday comfortable in his own self-righteousness; the decent moralist failed to see that something more than a mere negative

orthodoxy was required of the true Christian; the slumberer was not roused, the hungry were not fed; cottage lectures, pastoral visitation, as distinct from gossiping visits, the anxious leading of inquiring souls, were alike unknown to the rector of Canondale. It cannot then be a matter of surprise that when Lady Norbury came there she should deeply feel the lethargy and deadness which were on all sides of her. Sir Lionel had regretted the state of things, but his business and occupations led him to absent himself a good deal from home, and he contented himself with a liberal distribution of coals and blankets at Christmas, of soup twice a week during the cold weather, and a general injunction to the rector to apply to him whenever money was wanted.

Lady Norbury had not been married long before she told Sir Lionel that something really must be done for the education of the children of the village.

“There is hardly a place in the neighbour-

hood," she urged, "which has not a school of its own—many of them under Government inspection—and Canondale has nothing but a wretched dame's school. I really think that we ought to stir in the matter. The children are brought up in ignorance such as I could hardly have believed possible in this nineteenth century, and we must see whether our rector will not move about it."

"Well, my dear," said Sir Lionel, "you know I entirely agree with you as regards this subject. I am quite as anxious as you can be that the children of the village—many of them, too, the children of my own people,—should be properly educated. I spoke once to the rector about it, but he said that he thought over-education was a great mistake, that it was not necessary to teach all the 'ologies' in a village school, and that for his part he thought a dame's school quite sufficient."

"I think the rector entirely mistaken. I can hardly believe that he is aware of the gross

ignorance of the children. It is really something appalling. I have no wish whatever to over-educate them, or rather over-instruct them, for over-education is an impossibility, but I do earnestly desire that the children for whom in a certain sense we are responsible, should be trained in such a manner that they may be able to go out into the world with powers of self-restraint and a knowledge at any rate of what is right and what is wrong, and that when they leave the school they may have acquired the power of carrying on their own education in after life."

"I am sure I am quite ready to do anything as to the school that you think advisable. Suppose you were to walk over to the rectory by and by, and talk the matter over with Mr. Marsden."

"I will go at once," said Lady Norbury, and in half an hour she was ensconced in an arm chair in the drawing room at the rectory, Mr. Marsden standing somewhat nervously in front of the blazing fire.

After a few preliminary observations, Lady

Norbury entered at once upon the subject which had brought her to the rectory.

“I have been thinking a good deal lately,” she said, “about the educational state of the parish. It hardly seems to me what it ought to be; our dame’s school is terribly inefficient. The children are so imperfectly taught there that they lose what little they learn a year after they leave school. What do you think, Mr. Marsden?”

Mr. Marsden was seized with a sudden fit of coughing, which gave him a little time for deliberation before replying. At length he said—

“I do not wish, Lady Norbury, to deceive you in this matter, and I had better at once confess that in my opinion the country has gone education mad. What good it can ever do to teach our ploughboys geography, history, and grammar I cannot conceive. I am certain that it raises them above their station in life. Go where you will you find the mistresses of households complaining that they cannot get the same sort of domestic servants as formerly, that servants are

always wanting to change their situations, you find the gaols full, crime dreadfully on the increase, the papers full of murders and forgeries, and to my mind it seems clear that this education, about which all the world seems so crazy, is at the bottom of it."

"Well," said Lady Norbury, hardly able to repress a smile; "I question whether the system of education now in vogue has been tried sufficiently long to test it. It may be that the increase of crime only keeps pace with the increase of our population; it may be moreover that offences which were committed secretly in past years, are now by means of the daily press brought to the light of day, and that so the increase of crime is more apparent than real. I have heard Sir Lionel say this, and I think there is a great deal of truth in it, but I have no wish to enter upon the general question. Let us come back to Canondale school. I have no desire to raise the standard of education here to a high pitch, but I do think that at present it is miserably below



what it ought to be. The children of thirteen and fourteen years old cannot read without painfully spelling any word longer than a monosyllable, they are almost entirely ignorant of arithmetic, and, as to their writing, I should pity them if they were in after life called upon to write a letter, and I should equally pity the correspondent who had to read it."

"I really think, Lady Norbury," replied Mr. Marsden, "that you have exaggerated the case. I have not been into the school lately, for there have been some cases of scarlet fever amongst the children, and I hardly knew how far it was safe to encounter the heated atmosphere of the little room, but when last I was there it did not seem to me nearly so bad as you have represented it to be."

"I was there yesterday," said Lady Norbury, with a scarcely concealed air of disgust, "and I felt it absolutely necessary that something should be done. I have talked the matter over with

Sir Lionel, who is quite of the same opinion as myself; our wish is to co-operate with you if possible, but if you will not—”

“I should like to know what you think of doing,” interposed Mr. Marsden. “Why you cannot be satisfied with what we have now I cannot conceive. A few years ago there was no school at all, and, for my part, I don’t see that the people are any. . . . but I won’t enter upon that question. If you have formed any plans, Lady Norbury, I should be glad to be made acquainted with them.”

“What both Sir Lionel and myself wish, is that we should have a good school at Canondale, if possible under a certificated master; that the children may be taught to read intelligently without stumbling, to write easily and correctly, and to have such a knowledge of arithmetic as may enable them in after life to turn it to practical account. If they are to read with intelligence they must be taught to understand what



they read ; if they are to write a fair hand, their teacher must do the same ; and if their arithmetic is to be of any use to them in after years, they must be carried on a little beyond the simple figures of the multiplication table. Our wish, therefore, is to obtain the services of a schoolmaster who would do all this, while at the same time we hope he would attend as well to the children's higher and more important interests."

"But such a schoolmaster would never consent to keep school in our present building."

"Sir Lionel has considered that point, and would convert two of his cottages into a building well adapted for the purposes of the school."

"But the expense would be very great. The farmers subscribe next to nothing. I could not afford to increase my present subscription, which is quite as much as can be expected from me, and where the money would come from I am sure I cannot conceive."

"With regard to that, I may say at once that

any deficiency in the funds we should feel ourselves bound to supply."

"But our present schoolmistress"—urged Mr. Marsden—"it would be cruel to turn her out on the wide, wide world. How could she get a living at her time of life? I should be very sorry to see her on the parish allowance only."

"That, too, we should provide against," said Lady Norbury, rather haughtily. "Sir Lionel would place her at one of his lodges, and we should allow her a small pension. What do you say, Mr. Marsden, to our plan?"

Mr. Marsden was fairly driven into a corner, and after pausing for a few moments, he said—

"Lady Norbury, I fear I could not co-operate with you in this plan. With me it is a matter of principle. I consider the present education amply sufficient for the children of Canondale, and I have no wish to have anything whatever to do with one of your Government establishments, which are nothing better than homes for petted

schoolmasters who would be clergymen if they could, and nurseries for conceited scholars."

Lady Norbury rose, and, with a few common place remarks, left the rectory.

And so it came to pass, that when Mr. Leighton entered upon the possession of the Rectory of Canondale, he found a flourishing school with a capital master, and all educational appliances ready to hand, but a school into which his predecessor had never once set foot.

CHAPTER II.

“ Learning grew
Beneath his care, a thriving vigorous plant,
The mind was well informed, the passions held
Subordinate, and diligence was choice:
If e'er it chanced, as sometimes chance it must,
That one among so many over-leap'd
The limits of control, his gentle eye
Grew stern, and darted a severe rebuke;
His frown was full of terror, and his voice
Shook the delinquent with such fits of awe
As left him not, till penitence had won
Lost favour back again, and closed the breach.”
COWPER.

It was on the morning of the sixteenth, that Mr. and Mrs. Leighton might have been seen wending their way towards the village school of Canondale. The engagement at Loughborough was postponed, and Mr. Leighton feeling that he had acted well and wisely, was disposed to be in high good humour with all about him.



“I hope,” he said, “that Mr. Wallace will be in stronger health than he was when last he came here. It makes such a difference as to the comfort of the examination. If the opening of a door, or the movement of the pupil-teacher puts him out, as I remember it did before, it makes the teachers and the children so nervous and frightened. I must say a word to Johnson before the examination begins. Never having had his school examined before he is very anxious about it, and seems to look upon Mr. Wallace as an ogre in the form of a Government Inspector. I have tried to re-assure him about it, but all to no purpose.”

“Mr. Wallace certainly is no ogre,” said Mrs Leighton. “I cannot think how it is that the Government always seem to me to get such very agreeable men as inspectors. I never see them without pitying their wives, because their work takes them so much away from home.”

“As to that,” replied Mr. Leighton, “I dare

say the wives would have a different story to tell. I often think it must be a great nuisance to you to have your husband always at your beck and call, meddling with business which is not in his department, and having a finger in every home-made pie."

"My husband at my beck and call indeed! Why, Baldwin, you know I am constantly complaining how much your work outside your parish takes you away from us. I often wish the Diocesan Boards were—well I won't say what I wish about them, only I don't suppose it is uncharitable to bear a grudge against a Board if I am friendly with all the members of it."

Mr. Leighton smiled, and hearing quick steps behind him, turned round and saw Cecil and Marion coming after them as rapidly as Marion's newly found dignity as a young lady released from the trammels of the school room would allow.

"Why, Cecil, I thought you said you did not intend to come to the examination?"

"No, more I did, Father, but Marion persuaded me after you and my mother had left, that we had better come with you, and as I did not wish the reminiscences of one of my last days with her to be of disobedience to her orders, I yielded as usual, and here we are."

"Come along then, both of you. We must make haste, for it is nearly ten o'clock, and I want to be at the school before Lady Norbury brings Mr. Wallace down."

But in this respect, Mr. Leighton's wish was not wholly gratified. For on turning a corner in the road which brought the village school into view, they saw Lady Norbury apparently giving some final instructions to Johnson, doubtless with reference to the examination.

"I hope I'm not late," said the rector to his wife. "I do so hate unpunctuality."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Leighton, "I am sure you are not. It is most natural that Lady Norbury should wish to be here before the time, so

that she may see that everything is in apple-pie order before the inspector comes ; now Baldwin, dear," (and she drew closer to him so that Cecil and Marion should not hear,) "do not put on your constrained, hard look as though you wished Lady Norbury well out of the way. I have no doubt everything will go off capitally."

Mr. Leighton smiled, while Cecil stepped forward to open the wicket gate.

The school was of unpretending architecture. Two tenements had been somewhat cleverly converted into a fair village school room, with a house for the master containing two bedrooms and a sitting room. On the first inspection the Government Inspector had peremptorily ordered, in accordance with his instructions, that the brick floor which Sir Lionel had thought sufficient should be removed, and a wooden floor substituted for it, and now the whole building, greatly altered and improved, looked comfortable and cheery.

On the present occasion, the windows were ornamented with wreaths of laurel and holly intermixed in honour of the inspector's visit, which gave to the room rather the appearance of having been prepared for a school feast than for a school examination.

Lady Norbury came forward and shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Leighton. On seeing Cecil and Marion, a shade seemed to pass over her face, but if so, it passed away so quickly that you could scarcely say whether it was really there or whether it was not rather the effect of your own imagination.

"You too, here, Cecil. Why I almost wonder that you don't prefer taking a stroll with your gun, to coming down to sit quietly in a hot school. But I suspect you'll soon be tired of the examination. You will have quite enough of such things when you go up to College. Marion, you will find a seat there, next to Constance."

Constance was Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury's

only child. The family had originally consisted of four children. One died when quite a baby, but the two others had been carried off by malignant typhus fever, when they had reached the respective ages of twelve and fourteen, and long was it before Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury recovered from the severe blow. Constance, as may be supposed, was her parents' idol. If Lady Norbury could have spoiled any child, she would assuredly have spoiled Constance. But spoiling was not in Lady Norbury's nature, and though she was devotedly fond of her daughter, yet a certain sternness was occasionally apparent even in her manner towards her. Sir Lionel, on the contrary, petted his child (much to Lady Norbury's dislike) to such an extent, that everybody said that Constance could do what she liked with her father. She had just passed her sixteenth birthday, and was a tall elegant girl, with bright eyes, rich dark hair, and well formed features, such as you rarely see except in England or the Tyrol.

Marion gladly availed herself of Lady Norbury's hint, and, passing with a kindly nod of recognition the smiling group of faces around her, sat down by the side of Constance.

"I thought," said Lady Norbury to Mr. Leighton, "that I would come down here to make the final arrangements. I have left orders at home that Mr. Wallace is to be driven down in the pony chaise directly he comes. I expect him almost immediately. I suppose you are prepared to examine the children in Scripture and the Catechism, if Mr. Wallace asks you?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Leighton, "I will gladly do my best. I think I hear the wheels of the pony carriage."

As Mr. Leighton spoke, the little carriage was driven rapidly up to the school, and Lady Norbury went out to welcome Mr. Wallace.

It was as Mrs. Leighton had said. Mr. Wallace was a most agreeable, gentlemanly man, and soon put everybody at their ease. To Lady Nor-

bury's inquiries after his health, he answered that though in the early part of the winter he had found his work rather trying, yet that now the bright, clear weather had wonderfully freshened him up. He shook hands warmly with Mr. and Mrs. Leighton, and then had a kind word for the schoolmaster.

"Have you got your parchment yet—Johnson I think, Lady Norbury, you said his name was?"

"No, sir," replied Johnson, "I only left Battersea last Christmas, so I have never yet had my school examined."

"Well, you seem to have everything in very nice order about the grounds, and the maps and diagrams on the walls show that educational apparatus, at any rate, is not stinted."

Mr. Wallace looked round on the children, and said a few words *sotto voce* to Lady Norbury, as to their cleanly appearance.

"We make a great point of that," said Lady Norbury.

A few more preliminaries, and the examination began. The master, at Mr. Wallace's request, examined the first-class in arithmetic.

The inspection went on entirely to Lady Norbury's satisfaction, and apparently also to that of Mr. Wallace, so long as the examination of the classes was confined either to Mr. Wallace himself, or the schoolmaster; but at last it came to Mr. Leighton's turn to examine the first-class in Scripture. Now it must be confessed that Mr. Leighton was not an adept in the art of examination. The children were very fond of him, and on ordinary occasions he could acquit himself in a fairly creditable manner, but if there was one thing more than another which he dreaded, it was carrying on an examination in Lady Norbury's presence. He felt sure that her eagle eye was fixed upon him all the time. There was something within which told him that she was secretly anathematising him for what she thought his bungling way of putting the questions; and this feeling,

added to his own consciousness of partial inability, did not help to set him at ease. On the present occasion he was more unfortunate than usual. The room suddenly seemed to him to be unbearably hot, and if it had not been for his wife's kind look towards him from the opposite corner of the school, he felt that he must have broken down. Lady Norbury, moreover, had the habit of occasionally interposing questions of her own, intended to make the meaning of the examiner more clear, and ever and anon when the children appeared unable to answer, saying—

“Come, Charles, I am sure you know that. It was only last week I took you in this very same chapter,” or—

“Do speak up a little louder, Sarah, I am sure Mr. Wallace cannot hear what you say.”

Now if there is one thing which an examiner likes, it is to be entirely left alone. Certainly if he be at all a nervous man, to have an occasional question thrown in, or an explanation vouchsafed

of the reason for the children's silence is anything but consolatory. It cannot then be a matter of surprise that Mr. Leighton, when subjected to this terrible ordeal, should have made a partial failure. He was bitterly dissatisfied himself when, after some little time, Mr. Wallace turned round to him and said—

“Thank you, Mr. Leighton. That will do for their Scriptural examination. Some of them have answered very fairly.”

Mr. Leighton dared not look at Lady Norbury, but he felt that her eye was upon him, cold, dissatisfied, upbraiding.

There was, however, nothing to be said or done. Mr. Leighton felt that he had shown his own powers off, as well as those of the children, to great disadvantage, and that Mr. Wallace, who would naturally be ignorant of the under-current of feeling between himself and Lady Norbury, must have been rather astonished at his ill-success. Mr. Wallace, however, was very

good-natured about it, for when it came to Mr. Leighton's turn to examine the children in the Catechism, he asked the rector if he had any objection to his taking that part himself. Mr. Leighton courteously acquiesced, but with a certain feeling of uncertainty as to whether he was more annoyed or pleased at the proposal.

Soon after that the examination came to an end. The Inspector expressed himself on the whole well satisfied with the general results of the day's work.

"Cecil," said Mr. Leighton, as the party began to move, "Cecil, where are you?"

Cecil emerged from a corner in which he had been snugly ensconced behind Marion and Constance, and came forward, looking as if he had been guilty of some crime.

"Cecil, you had better go and order Mr. Wallace's fly to come down here for him."

"Thank you," said Mr. Wallace, "I prefer walking up to Lady Norbury's. I really do,"

he added, as he saw Mr. Leighton still hesitating whether to send Cecil or not.

"As you like," said Mr. Leighton, "I shall be glad to walk with you."

The road to Oakwood Park, and the road to the rectory were for some little distance the same, and so the whole party came out from the school, and started on their way home together.

Lady Norbury and Mrs. Leighton led the way; Mr. Wallace and the rector followed, deep in conversation; while the young people brought up the rear.

"I must confess," said Cecil, "I am rather sorry that it is over—we were so comfortable in the corner—and though the room felt stuffy and hot, it did not matter for once."

"I wonder what made you come," said Constance. "I should not have expected it would have been in your way. I do not remember ever seeing you in the school before, and as you go to Oxford to-morrow, I should have thought you

would rather have had your last day's hunting, or something of that kind."

"Well, of course I should have enjoyed a run very much, but my Father rather wished me to come, so like a dutiful son, as I always am, I obeyed orders."

"Then your reason," said Constance, "was the same as mine. I came because I thought my Mother would not have liked me to be absent when the examination took place, but if it had not been for that, I would much rather have enjoyed a gallop on Lady-bird this beautiful morning."

Cecil looked as if he would have wished for nothing better than a gallop over the downs, with Constance as his companion; but if these were his thoughts he prudently concealed them, adding—

"Well, whatever the reason may have been which made me come to the school this morning, I am afraid this is the last time I shall see you

before I go to Oxford. I go very early to-morrow morning."

"Yes, I suppose it is, and then when you get up to Oxford, with all your musty books and wrinkled dons, you will quite forget all about Canondale, and us who remain behind. I should like some day to be a little bird, and see all you are doing up there. I think it must be very grand to be a member of such an ancient University, and I should like of all things to see the men we hear so much about—Pusey and Jowett, and all the rest of them—and I should like to hear the University sermons, for I suppose they get the best preachers in England to come and preach to the undergraduates."

"Well, Constance, why shouldn't you try to persuade Sir Lionel to bring you up to Oxford for the Commemoration? Almost all undergraduates have some friends up, and it would be so very pleasant if you would come. I would lionize you all about, and show you everything

worth seeing, and we would have such pleasant luncheons in my room, and a boating party to Nuneham. Do think of it. I dare say Lady Norbury would not have any objection."

There may have been something in Cecil's tone as he said the last words, for they certainly appeared to have the effect of casting a shade over Constance's face as she replied—

"I doubt very much whether my Mother would consent; but at any rate, Cecil, I promise you this, I will ask her."

"That's right, Constance," said Cecil, "it would be capital fun if you could manage it."

"But what has become of Marion," said Constance, "she has run on to the others, I think," and as she spoke they came suddenly upon the rest of the party at the point where the roads to Oakwood Park and the rectory diverged.

Lady Norbury carried Mr. Wallace off with her. There seemed a cloud on her face when she said good-bye to Mr. Leighton, but her words were not unfriendly.

"I hope you were satisfied, Mr. Leighton," she said, "with the examination. I thought in some subjects the children answered very creditably."

Lady Norbury hardly seemed to expect an answer, which was rather a relief to Mr. Leighton, and so the two parties separated.

Cecil whispered to Constance, "Do not forget about Oxford. It would be so jolly if you could come."

Constance was interrupted in her answer by Lady Norbury saying—

"Come, Constance, my child, do not linger any longer. We are rather late as it is. Good-bye, Cecil, good-bye."

CHAPTER III.

"O never say a careless word
Hath not the power to pain!
The shaft may ope some hidden wound
That closes not again.
Weigh well those light-winged messengers;
God marked thy heedless word,
And with it, too, the falling tear,
The heart-pang that it stirred.

"Words! what are words? An idle breath
That floateth lightly by,
Smiles on the lip that uttered them
In tones of melody.
Yet have they strength to wound or bless,
Lightly as they are flung:
Still wait upon some human heart
Told by an angel's tongue."

ANNA SHIPTON.

LADY NORBURY's only sister, Mrs. Egerton, was the wife of a Yorkshire squire. Lady Norbury had kept up through life a constant interchange of thought with her; the interests of each were

dear to the other; and we cannot, therefore, wonder that a few days after the examination of Canondale School the post-bag should have contained a voluminous letter to Mrs. Egerton, giving details of all that had occurred. We shall take the liberty of breaking the seal of the letter, and place its contents before our readers. It ran as follows:—

“Oakwood Park, Canondale,

“March 18th, 18—

“MY DEAREST LUCY,—

“I feel sure that you will be anxious to hear how our school examination passed off, because you know I was rather nervous about it in consequence of its being Johnson’s first inspection. Mr. Wallace (whom perhaps you may remember meeting last year, when we dined at the Deanery) was the Government Inspector, and we all liked him very much. I have no doubt you will recollect him—a tall, handsome,

striking-looking man, though evidently delicate. He was very kind in his manner towards Mr. Johnson, and quickly set him at his ease. We had a very good attendance of children. Your favourites, the Gooddisons, were not there, as two of them have the measles. The children had (of their own accord) decorated the school-room with wreaths and evergreens quite prettily. I was pleased at this, as it looked as if, at any rate, they did not consider the day a penitential one. Constance and I were down at the school early to see that everything was arranged properly, and soon after we had got there the party from the rectory arrived. Cecil was with his father. Why he came I cannot conceive. I think he is very forward for his age, but I daresay that will be taken out of him at college. Mr. Wallace and Mr. Johnson conducted the main part of the examination, and did it very well. Mr. Wallace put his questions clearly and succinctly, and the children answered capitally; but oh, my dearest

Lucy, when it came to Mr. Leighton's turn to examine it was really quite pitiable. I had taken the precaution, when first we got down there, to ask him if he was prepared to take the Scripture examination, and he said he was; but he really did put his questions in such a confused and round-about way that the children could not understand them at all. I was dreadfully vexed, and could not refrain from putting in a word every now and then to help the children. If it hadn't been for that they really would hardly have answered anything at all; but even this I could see vexed Mr. Leighton. Why, I do not know, except that he is so very touchy. You may be sure, however, that his annoyance did not stop me, for really I felt quite distressed for the poor children. It was not fair upon them. It is so stupid of Mr. Leighton. He did just the same last year, and ought to have taken warning by that. It would be much better if he stayed away altogether. I am sure we none of us

wanted him there. We should have got on much better without him. I spoke to Mr. Wallace about it afterwards, for I was so dreadfully annoyed that the children should have failed, but he rather took Mr. Leighton's part—I can't think why. He said that to examine well was quite an art, and that many persons who when alone could teach and examine a class admirably, get nervous when called upon to do it in public, and that he found really very few clergy who distinguished themselves in it. If so, I say more shame to them. Mr. Leighton must know that I would much rather he did not come to the school on these occasions, and I believe it is partly to annoy me that he does come. But I must not run on upon this subject, or you will send me a scolding letter in return, and I do not want that. You must not suppose, from my account, that the examination was a failure. It was anything but that; on the contrary, Mr. Wallace expressed himself, on the whole,

thoroughly well satisfied. It is only that I have been very angry with Mr. Leighton ever since, and I hope that having poured out my thoughts to you will have done away with my indignation. I really think there are few persons who have so much to put up with as I have, and Lionel is quite quiet and unmoved about it all, which vexes me all the more. He was not at the examination, for some business or other took him away from home that day. I declare I have come to the end of my second sheet, and have not said a word to you about your Godchild. She is very blooming, and if I were not her mother I should say looking very pretty. If she were in the room, and knew I was writing to you, she would send you her dear love. You would be glad if you saw her riding on Lady-bird. She does so enjoy a gallop with her father, and your pony is a charming one. But I must leave off. Tell me when you write how the old woman is for whom you wrote

for the receipt for rheumatism. Don't forget this.

“I am always, dearest Lucy's

“Very affectionate sister,

“LOUISA NORBURY.”

Mrs. Egerton's answer came in due course, and it would be unfair to withhold it from our readers :—

“The Elms, Wynchdale,

“March 25th, 18—

“MY DEAREST LOUISA,—

“Thank you so much for your long and interesting letter about the examination of your school. It just gave me the details which I wanted to know. On the whole, I think you have every reason to be well satisfied. Of course, it would have been better if Mr. Leighton had not broken down, but I must say that I rather feel for him. You know, dearest Louisa, that he acts upon you in much the same way as soda

does upon acid (that's right isn't it?), and that your looks towards him are not calculated to reassure him. I know you tell me he is not nervous, and is cold and hard; but, dearest sister, I have watched him closely, and I am *sure* that I can detect much nervousness under a calm, and perhaps slightly haughty, exterior. Now, pray do not be angry with me, and say I always take Mr. Leighton's part. I write this simply because I do so feel for you, and so wish that matters might be on a happier footing between Mr. Leighton and yourself, and therefore it is that I wish to put before you anything which might lead you to look more favourably upon him. That is rather a long sentence, but you know what I mean. As to ourselves, I really have nothing to say of any interest. Frank has been having some capital runs lately. I wish, by the by, when next you write you would give me the names of some books to order from Mudie's. Up in these wilds we never hear of

any. As to my rheumatic patient, whom you ask about, your prescription worked wonders! Why not issue it as a patent medicine, as an infallible cure for rheumatism, gout, lumbago, &c., &c.? I am sure it would answer. But enough of this nonsense. Kiss my darling Constance for me.

“I am, always

“Your truly affectionate Sister,

“LUCY EGERTON.”

It so happened that Mr. and Mrs. Leighton were engaged to dine at Oakwood Park on the very day on which Mrs. Egerton's letter had arrived. If the rector had been privileged to read the preceding letters as we have been, he would have felt even more than usually uncomfortable. As it was, a dinner party at Oakwood Park was a very doubtful pleasure to him. He always felt nervous in Lady Norbury's presence. His usual tact and self-possession seemed suddenly to desert him, and he lived in constant terror lest

something should occur which would occasion an open breach between them. He felt it, however, a matter of duty never to decline Sir Lionel's invitation, unless he was positively obliged to do so. He would do, at any rate, all that lay in his power to cultivate a more amicable relationship with the wife of his squire.

"Well, Leighton, and how are you?" was Sir Lionel's warm greeting, as he shook him by the hand on entering the drawing room. "Haven't seen you, except in church, for a long time—but, I suppose, you will say that is my fault, not yours, for I am a terrible runaway from home."

A great contrast was this to Lady Norbury's welcome, who shook hands with the rector in a most dignified way, as if she would not be entrapped into any compromise of principle by the freedom of a convivial entertainment. Mr. Leighton felt that in the very touch of her hand, and the coldness of her look, there was a tacit

reproof conveyed for his failure on the sixteenth. Mrs. Leighton was soon ensconced upon the sofa by Lady Norbury's side, while Mr. Leighton joined Sir Lionel on the hearth-rug. By and by other guests arrived. It was almost entirely, as is so often the case in the country, a clerical party. There was Mr. Hislop, Canon of Lichfield and the rector of Quarley, and Mr. Childs, curate of Winbrook. To counter-balance these, Mr. Pearce, the curate of Leigh and a widower, brought two daughters, of a certain age, who, together with Lady Walters and Mr. Malthus, Sir Lionel's agent, made up the party.

It fell to Mr. Leighton's lot to take into dinner the eldest Miss Pearce. She was a general favourite—an active helper to her father at Leigh—energetic in all parish matters which come within the province of a lady, although it was whispered that “her tendencies were decidedly high.”

Mr. Leighton—who, although a good Church-

man, had no ultra views, was large-hearted enough to recognise energy and warmth in a fellow-worker although it might not be directed and guided exactly as he would have wished—stepped forward gladly at Lady Norbury's summons to escort Miss Pearce to the dining room. He manœuvred successfully to take his place near the bottom of the table out of the region of Lady Norbury's influence.

Grace was said by the rector, and the usual common-places of a dinner party began.

Miss Pearce wished to know if Cecil had gone up to Oxford yet.

"Yes," said Mr. Leighton, "he went a few days ago, and Marion has had a letter from him saying that he has got on capitally so far. He has very nice rooms in his college, for a freshman, looking out into the Quadrangle, and has already met with several old school acquaintances who seem ready to welcome him cordially."

"I should so like to hear all that you can tell

me about what he does and sees up at Oxford. If anything could make me wish to change my sex it would be that I might go up to Oxford as a University man. I can fancy nothing more delightful. The quiet and repose of those noble buildings struck me very much when I was there with my father last year, and I can imagine a member of any one of the colleges becoming most enthusiastic about it all."

"Cecil, however, has hardly had time to get very enthusiastic about anything. He has been occupied in settling himself, buying some furniture for his rooms, and crockery for his pantry cupboard, and other such-like essentially sub-lunary matters, which even in Oxford must be attended to."

"Yes, that may be so. But even the wearing of the cap and gown, and the living in a college, and going to chapel morning and evening, and dining in a sort of baronial hall—all must be so very novel a life to him that surely he must write home enthusiastically?"

“I don’t know that there is much enthusiasm about his letters. Young men of the present day are not usually disposed to enthusiasm. He seems, so far, happy and comfortable—much more than that I should not expect, and I hope and trust he will do well.”

“Has he heard any celebrated preacher yet?” said Miss Pearce, rather more timidly, as if approaching a more dangerous subject.

“Well, I don’t know whether you would consider that he answered to your description, but he heard Stanley preach the first Sunday he was at Oxford.”

“And what did he think of him?”

“Do you mean what did he think of his personal appearance, or his powers as a preacher?”

“Oh, of course, I meant what did he think of him as a preacher?”

“Well, if the truth must be told, he said that his manner was rather awkward, and his delivery monotonous. There was, however, great boldness in the enunciation of his opinions

and evident earnestness about the man altogether."

"Well, I hope at any rate that Cecil will not be entrapped by Stanley. I cannot bear his views. There seems to be such a lack of reverence for all that we have been taught to hold dear and count sacred, that I would rather your son were the lowest of the low than take up with these liberal Broad Churchmen."

"I am rather disposed to agree with you," said Mr. Leighton, smiling at Miss Pearce's warmth, "and I really do not think there is much fear of Cecil becoming a follower of Stanley. He has at any rate been brought up very differently, and I have not much fear of it myself."

"I almost wonder you, who know all about these things, are not afraid to send him to Oxford with so much heresy as there must be there of one kind and another. It is an awful ordeal to go through."

"So it is, but if men are to be worth anything

in after life, they must be prepared to choose the good and refuse the evil, and discern between the various contending parties. Safety does not lie in ignorance of the divisions which unhappily are so rife in our days. A man must be brought into contact with them, and make up his own mind on matters of controversy. He cannot be kept like a hot-house plant all his days, defended from every harmful breath. The main point is to brace him for the contest before he encounters it, and this I trust we have done with Cecil. He has been a child of many prayers, and I confidently trust that God will protect him."

"Indeed so do I, Mr. Leighton, but it must be an anxious time for you and Mrs. Leighton."

Mr. Hislop's conversation with Lady Norbury had been of a very different character. It had fallen to him, as Canon of the Cathedral, to take her into dinner, and he was placed at her right hand. Lady Norbury, soon after the commencement of dinner, opened unconsciously a flood-gate

by saying in rather an under tone, so that the curates present might not hear—

“So I understand your present curate is about to leave you. Do you think he would suit Mr. Leighton, for I rather think he is looking out for one?”

“Suit Mr. Leighton,” replied Mr. Hislop in the same low voice, “indeed he would not. I shall be quite thankful when he is gone. I gave him a title, so I am obliged to keep him for two years, but as soon as ever his time is out he will leave me, and that will be in about another two months. You can hardly conceive, Lady Norbury, what a plague curates are.”

Lady Norbury smiled. “So I have heard other rectors say; but then you know, Mr. Hislop, I hear the other side from the curates, and I must say I think there is quite as often as much fault on the rector’s side as on the curate’s.”

“I am sure you would not say so in my case if you knew all the circumstances. I can assure you

that my curate has been no help whatever to me. What work I have given him to do I have generally had to do over again, and he has got me into many a scrape by his carelessness. I am positive the congregation cannot make out what he is driving at in his sermons, they are so frightfully confused. Then he inked the surplice, by registering some marriage before taking his surplice off—which I had specially warned him against—kept a funeral waiting by unpardonable unpunctuality, promised some sacrament money to the most arrant thieves and beggars in the whole place, . . .”

“Stop, stop,” said Lady Norbury, “we must not have too many counts in one indictment. Now, I will be the counsel for the defence, and take your points in order. As to his sermons, I am not likely to be an apologist for poor sermons, but I suppose, like everything else, a clergyman cannot write good sermons all at once, but must come to it by degrees. His first efforts must be

tentative, and I should think that any young curate would be thankful if his rector would take the trouble of criticising his sermons kindly."

"I am not so sure of that. Young authors proverbially love their own offspring, and young curates are no exception to the rule. I pointed out the defects of one sermon to my curate, but he was very much vexed at it."

"Well, I often pity young curates who perhaps have entered upon their work without any special training, and then are expected to preach as often and as well as those who have been years and years in the ministry. They must serve their apprenticeship. Then, let me see, what was the next point? Oh, yes, I remember—inking the surplice. It must have been very annoying;" —was Lady Norbury quizzing him, thought Mr. Hialop—"but perhaps the poor young man was nervous at performing the marriage service, and so forgot all your good instructions when he got into the vestry. I dare say salts of lemon, if you had thought of it, would have taken it out."

“Of course, I don’t wish to make much of that. It was only a little thing, but life is made up of little things, and it annoyed me at the time, I remember. One of the questions in the arch-deacon’s visitation queries is whether the surplices are free from iron-mould, and my belief is that ink always turns to iron-mould.”

“I trust no such awful catastrophe as iron-mould ensued, but let us pass on to the next point—keeping the funeral waiting. Now to show you how candid and unbiassed I am, I will say at once that there is no excuse for such a thing happening twice. An unforeseen accident may occasion it once, but twice—never. Better far for the clergyman to be kept waiting a quarter of an hour or more than that the mourners should at that particular moment be exposed to trouble and anxiety, which a little care might have avoided. No, Mr. Hislop, I have nothing to say for your curate on that point. What was the next thing, I forget?”

“Giving the sacrament alms away most un-

thinkingly, which I am sure, Lady Norbury, you would have thought most unwise if it had been done in Canondale."

"Perhaps I should," said Lady Norbury, "but if I had been you, Mr. Hislop, I should not have crowned two kings of Brentford, and should not have let my curate distribute the money, when he could not have known the temper and disposition of the people as well as their rector."

And with this parting shot Lady Norbury turned to Mr. Childs, who somewhat unexpectedly had found himself placed on the other side of her.

When the ladies left the dining room, the gentlemen drew their chairs round the fire.

Sir Lionel had seen that a somewhat animated conversation had passed between his wife and Mr. Hislop, and, anxious to conciliate his guest, paid him marked attention.

"Pass the wine, Leighton, if you won't take any. It's very good, bottled in 1836, and won't

do you any harm. Well, if you would rather not, fill Mr. Hislop's glass."

Mr. Hislop courteously acquiesced in Sir Lionel's wishes, and the attention of the host was not lost upon the guest. General conversation followed.

"Are you likely to make any change in the management of our county gaol?" asked Mr. Pearce.

"I am not quite sure," answered Sir Lionel. "There is a great stir about the matter just now. I cannot bear the thoughts of prisoners in a gaol being treated better than paupers in a workhouse."

"At the same time we must not forget that the confinement and monotony of prison life make it almost necessary on the score of health that the prisoners should have rather better fare than might be thought advisable on abstract principles."

"I don't deny that," replied Sir Lionel, "but

there is a medium in all things. Let the ordinary prison fare be on a lower scale than the ordinary workhouse fare, and only be raised on the certificate of the medical man. I think it is most important that the idea should not go forth that our prisons are comfortable residences, where a man may spend a few months without much discomfort. I am old-fashioned enough to think that prison discipline should be penal as well as corrective—the former certainly—the latter if you can.”

“True,” said Mr. Pearce, “but there have been some horrible stories lately of men coming out of the gaols half-starved and emaciated, with their strength gone.”

“I should like to know the particulars of the cases before replying. There is so much exaggeration in these matters. You can have no idea how the complaints which the prisoners make in gaol, when inquired into, dwindle away into the most insignificant proportions. Besides

which, we must remember this. It is very sad that a man should come out of the goal thin and weak, but you must think of society as well as the prisoner, and if everything is done to hamper the convicted thief, and he comes out of prison fat and sleek, take my word for it, his imprisonment has been a curse to himself and the country."

Mr. Pearce did not feel disposed to carry on the argument any further, and they soon responded to Sir Lionel's invitation to "join the ladies."

Beyond the mere civility of a welcome, nothing had yet passed between Lady Norbury and Mr. Leighton that evening. He thought himself bound therefore, as the rector, before the gentlemen had been long in the drawing room, to draw near to her chair and say a few civil words. Mr. Leighton was never wanting in that courtesy which is due from a gentleman to a lady, even though that lady be rather more domineering than is pleasant.

Mr. Leighton, thinking he had hit upon a safe subject, began—

“What a great improvement you have made in the beds in the flower garden, Lady Norbury. Those shrubs, too, which you have taken away will make the whole place look so much lighter and more cheerful.”

“Well, I think they will,” said Lady Norbury, “but to tell you the truth I had other objects in view in making these alterations besides any possible improvement to our flower garden. There were so many men out of employment in the winter, that I begged Sir Lionel to let me take some of them on, more with the view of benefitting them and their families than anything else. Indiscriminate almsgiving, I think, does more harm almost than anything. To give a man money robs him of his independence of character; give him work and pay him for it, and you supply him with the means of subsistence without pauperising him.

And that reminds me, Mr. Leighton, of a matter I want to speak to you about. You don't mind having a little parish talk, even after dinner, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Leighton, rather feebly, while a close observer would have seen that he withdrew within himself almost instantaneously ; "pray say anything you like about parish matters."

"Well, it is about Goodlake's family I want to speak to you. Mrs. Leighton I fear is ruining that girl by her kindness to her. You know yourself how much I have done—and Sir Lionel, too, for that matter—for all the Goodlakes. That girl Jane was always rather a *protégée* of mine, and as you know, I got her a capital place as nursery-maid. Then, when she came back home, a disgrace to herself and family, I fairly told her mother that I must wash my hands of her altogether ; such ingratitude and baseness I never heard. And now Mrs. Goodlake tells me that

Mrs. Leighton has got Jane another place, and that she is going there almost immediately. I could hardly believe it when I heard it. But perhaps, after all, it isn't true?"

"Yes," said Mr. Leighton, somewhat gravely. "It is quite true, and Mrs. Leighton has acted as she has done with my entire concurrence. I believe that she has followed a prudent and certainly a Christian course. When Jane first returned to the village I saw her, and that constantly; if ever girl was penitent I believe her to be so; and I think it would be cruel indeed to say that we would not give her a helping hand in regaining her lost character, and earning an honest and honourable livelihood. God knows there are temptations enough in a girl's way without our adding to them by shutting her out for ever from domestic service. I am rejoiced to think that she will not be out in the fields this next summer, and will at any rate be shielded from what I think is very hardening and de-

moralizing. The lady who has engaged her knows perfectly well all the facts of the case, will not blazon them abroad to the world at large, and I have every reason to hope that Jane sees the folly of which she has been guilty; mourns over it as sin against her God, and is determined with His grace to live for the time to come in a very different manner to what she has done. Surely, Lady Norbury, it is my duty as her pastor to do all in my power to help her in her earnest resolve to 'lead a godly, righteous, and sober life.'"

"Undoubtedly," said Lady Norbury. "The only question is whether the mode you have adopted is the best way. I had done all in my power for Jane, and I certainly looked for a very different result. We will hope, however, that Jane may be a true penitent, but such cases are very rare. My experience tells me that relapses into sin are terribly common."

"But that does not make it the less our duty

to strive to lead the sorrowing heart to the knowledge of a Saviour for sinners, and to take the fallen ones by the hand, if haply thereby a sinner may be turned from the error of her ways. No, Lady Norbury, I cannot regret that my wife has interested herself about Jane Goodlake."

Soon after the party broke up, and when Mr. Leighton, on his way home, had somewhat relieved his mind by detailing to his wife his conversation with Lady Norbury, he could not help adding—

"I think Lady Norbury's Bible must be a mutilated edition. I have often thought that the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle of the Corinthians must have been omitted, and now I think the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of St. John must have been struck out, too."

'Baldwin, Baldwin,' said a quiet voice at his ear; "'Charity endureth all things,' is in your Bible."

CHAPTER IV.

"O, day most calm, most bright!
The fruit of this, the next world's bud;
The indorsement of supreme delight,
Writ by a friend, and with his blood;
The couch of time; care's balm and bay;—
The week were dark but for thy light:
Thy torch doth show the way.

"The Sundays of man's life
Threaded together on time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal, glorious King.
On Sunday Heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope.

"Thou art a day of mirth;
And where the week-days trail on ground,
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth.
O, let me take thee at the bound,
Leaping with thee from seven to seven,
Till that we both, being tossed from earth,
Fly hand in hand to Heaven."

GEORGE HERBERT.

SUNDAY was a day observed at Oakwood Park
with very considerable strictness. Lady Nor-

bury would on no account have permitted any outward breach of propriety on that day. If Sir Lionel ever did take a secret glance at the newspaper, it must have been in the recesses of his study, whither few ventured to intrude, and none to enter without a knock. The novels of the day were removed from off the tables of the drawing room, and books suitable for Sunday reading substituted for them. The topics of conversation, moreover, seemed to hover round the Church, or something connected, however remotely, with ecclesiastical matters. Anything which had to do with the rector or the parish, the services of the Church, or the people who congregated there, was considered to be far removed from the ordinary conversation of the week. It mattered not so much what was the spirit displayed, as what was the topic discussed.

Hence it often happened that poor Mr. Leighton's sermons came in for a somewhat undue share of criticism, simply from the lack of variety

in the subjects considered suitable. Lay hearers are somewhat unreasonable in their requirements. They oftentimes forget that their clergyman has to prepare his sermons week after week, and month after month, and year after year, amidst much distraction of mind and not unfrequently with much weakness of body. They expect him always to be at his best, and make no allowance for the wear and tear of parochial work. It is not every lawyer who distinguishes himself as an advocate, it is not every member of Parliament who is an orator, and yet both the one and the other may be highly useful in their day and generation. But a Procrustean rule is laid down for the clergy. No amount of pastoral diligence makes up for dulness in the pulpit. The truth is not sufficient now-a-days for critical hearers. It must be truth highly spiced, and served up with plenty of cayenne. And thus it came to pass that the morning sermon was generally the subject of discussion at the luncheon table at

Oakwood Park on Sunday. The departure of the servants from the room—whose presence so often exercises a wholesome restraint—was usually the signal for the commencement of the attack. Mr. Leighton, it must be confessed, rather laid himself open to criticism. His sermons were not brilliant. They were evidently written by a good and holy man, but they lacked variety and arrangement.

“Lionel, did you see whether the sermon-paper was very yellow this morning,” said Lady Norbury one day to her husband, on their return from morning service.

“You know, my dear,” responded Sir Lionel, “I cannot see the pulpit very well from my corner of our seat. But whether the paper was old or not, it seemed to me a good, sensible sermon.”

“What do you mean by the paper being yellow, Mamma?” asked Constance. “What can it signify what colour the paper is. I don’t see

how that affects the sermon. If Mr. Leighton has straw paper it would naturally look yellow, but the sermon would be just the same, whether written on yellow or blue paper."

Lady Norbury laughingly replied—

"Paper gets yellow if put by in a cupboard for any great length of time, and when brought out again to see the light, the marks of time's hoary hand are plainly visible upon it. It seemed to me that Mr. Leighton's sermon must have been written a long time ago. In fact one or two passages in it seemed familiar to my ears; I think I remember that sentence in which he said, that sleep was the antechamber of death. He should have left out that sentence if he didn't want us to find out that it was not a new sermon."

"But why should he mind our knowing that it was not a new sermon?" said Constance. "Isn't it the same thing, if he wrote it himself years ago or last week?"

"I am not quite so sure of that," said Lady Norbury. "Mr. Leighton has not so much to do in the parish during the week but that he could find time for his sermons. I should not think it took very long to write a sermon, with a concordance and notes and Biblical commentaries."

"Well, I agree with Constance," said Sir Lionel. "It seems to me quite ridiculous to say that a clergyman should never preach a sermon more than once. If he has taken pains with it, and written it carefully, I do not see why, after some time has elapsed, he should not give it us over again. The truth remains the same, the lessons to be enforced remain the same, and I am very much afraid that in the majority of congregations, the same warnings need to be repeated times without number. I am sure we all of us soon forget a sermon after we have heard it, and unless you mark the text in your Bible, I don't believe you would find out whether the sermon is new or old. For my part I thought

Mr. Leighton's sermon this morning quite an interesting one. Now don't look sarcastic, Louisa. I do not for a moment pretend to say it was brilliant, but there were many things said which I think we should all do well to attend to."

"I do not deny that for a moment," replied Lady Norbury, "but I confess that I wish Mr. Leighton would not quite so often presume upon our having forgotten what he preaches."

"Is not that rather a proof of his humility, and of his consciousness of his own defects in the pulpit?"

"What nonsense you talk, Lionel. I am sure you do not really think that Mr. Leighton has a low opinion of his own preaching powers. Why he is constantly going about to other churches preaching, when he might perhaps just as well stop at home."

"Oh, but that is only because he is rural dean, and the clergy in his deanery naturally ask him occasionally to come and preach for

bury would on no account have permitted any outward breach of propriety on that day. If Sir Lionel ever did take a secret glance at the newspaper, it must have been in the recesses of his study, whither few ventured to intrude, and none to enter without a knock. The novels of the day were removed from off the tables of the drawing room, and books suitable for Sunday reading substituted for them. The topics of conversation, moreover, seemed to hover round the Church, or something connected, however remotely, with ecclesiastical matters. Anything which had to do with the rector or the parish, the services of the Church, or the people who congregated there, was considered to be far removed from the ordinary conversation of the week. It mattered not so much what was the spirit displayed, as what was the topic discussed.

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them. Really, Louisa, I think you are very hard upon Mr. Leighton. You seem to me always to look at what he does with suspicion."

"If I do," said Lady Norbury rather sharply, "Mr. Leighton at any rate never lacks a champion."

"Well, I always get on very well with him, and he seems to me to have his heart thoroughly in his work. Why should I side against him?"

"Nobody asks you to side against him. But, even for our rector, I cannot be blind to the truth. To my knowledge he was at Stafford two days last week, and over at Loughborough another day, so it is not to be wondered at that he should not have time to treat us to a new discourse."

"I daresay he had business, which we know nothing about. Clergy have their own private business to transact, as well as other people—perhaps he went over to see his lawyer—who knows?"

“Who, indeed,” said Lady Norbury, “certainly neither you nor I. At any rate, I hope we shall not have another old sermon this afternoon.”

Sir Lionel said nothing. He felt that it was useless to argue on a point on which Lady Norbury had evidently made up her mind. He was wise enough to steer clear of the difficulties which constantly arose from Lady Norbury’s intercourse with Mr. Leighton, and did not feel disposed to sacrifice domestic peace as knight-errant doing battle for his rector.

Lady Norbury rose and left the luncheon room, saying—

“Constance, I am going up as far as the Goodlakes’ before church. Will you come with me? You can stop outside at the gate while I go into the cottage.”

Constance and her mother were soon equipped for their walk, and set forth. It was a fine, bright day, one of those genial days which in the early spring sometimes beguile you into the

thought that now winter has really passed; you begin to think of spring flowers, and spring birds, of open windows and evening strolls.

The village of Canondale bore that quiet aspect which all nature, far away from the noise and bustle of town life, assumes on Sundays.

Would you know what were Lady Norbury's thoughts as she gazed on the well known scene? They were thoughts such as must often have passed through the mind of one who lives in the country. She looked at the fields all green with the growing corn. She looked at the thatched cottages nestling here and there under the hill side, she looked at the gables of the school, rising prettily in the distance. "Ah," thought she, "how sad it is, that scenes so fair to the outward eye should be so marred by the presence of sin. That pretty cottage with the vine trained over it. The poet would sing of it as the abode of love and harmony, where all nature smiles within and without. How untrue a picture!

How well I know of the hatred and discord which reign there. How much I fear that oaths and blasphemies, instead of the song of village swains, are sounds familiar to the ears of the in-dwellers. All nature is bright, fair and lovely, man defiles it and mars God's handiwork."

"Why, Mamma, you are in a regular brown study," said Constance, "are you still thinking of Mr. Leighton's sermon? I wish you would not trouble yourself so much about him as you do."

"No, dear," said Lady Norbury, "I was not thinking either of Mr. Leighton or his sermon. My thoughts were very different, but I won't trouble you with them, for here we are at the Goodlakes'. I shan't be long in the cottage, so you can wait for me outside the garden."

Lady Norbury opened the wicket and walked in. She found the door of the cottage shut, and her knock caused an evident commotion within. A shuffling movement was plainly heard and the

rustling of a dress. In a minute or two the door was opened, and a woman, neat and tidy in her dress, but with signs of care deeply printed on her brow, said, on seeing the visitor—

“I beg your pardon, my Lady, I did not know it was you or I would not have kept you waiting, I’m sure. Be pleased to walk in and sit down.”

With these words she wiped a chair with her apron, and Lady Norbury entered at once upon the topic which she wished to bring before her.

“I have come to speak to you about your daughter Jane—I have heard—it matters not from whom—that she is going out to service again, and I wanted to learn from you whether it really is the case. I can hardly think it likely that anybody would be induced to take her without a character, but still I wished to learn the real facts from you.”

Lady Norbury paused, but Mrs. Goodlake did not seem inclined to break the silence.

“Tell me, Mrs. Goodlake. Is Jane really going

out as a servant again ? From your not answering me I am almost led to believe that she actually has got a place."

"Well, my Lady," Mrs. Goodlake at length replied, "my Jane, it is true, has brought trouble upon her father and me such as we hoped never to have been called upon to bear, we have not defended her conduct, and she knows well enough how it distressed us. But, my Lady, she is our child for all that, and we must do the best we can by her. She has grieved night and day over her folly, and sees now the misery it has brought upon us all and herself too. All this Mr. Leighton pointed out clearly to her. He has been a friend in need, and my opinion is that he has been the means of bringing her to a real knowledge of her sin, and that if she is saved from the punishment she has deserved, we have to thank him as well as our Father in Heaven for it."

"But you have not answered my question, Mrs. Goodlake. Of course I am very glad to hear what

you say about Mr. Leighton's kindness and Jane's penitence, for there was plenty of room for it, and I hope time will prove it to be real and deep ; but all that has nothing to do with her getting a place. Has she really got one, and if so, who could recommend her or give her a character?"

"Yes, my Lady, she is going next week as housemaid to Mrs. Holmes. Mr. Leighton recommended her. I went over and saw Mrs. Holmes myself, told her all the circumstances connected with our trouble, and she said that if Mr. Leighton could speak well of Jane since, and give her good hope that she had repented of her sin, she would not object to take her, and would be careful that the other servants knew nothing of her fall. When I came back I saw Mr. Leighton and mentioned to him what Mrs Holmes had said. He told me he would write to Mrs. Holmes. What he wrote to her I do not know, but Mrs. Holmes has engaged Jane, and I am

thankful to God that she has a fresh start given her."

"I only hope Mr. Leighton will never have cause to repent having recommended Jane," said Lady Norbury, rather coldly, "but when I remember all the pains we took with her before, and the good education which she had in our school, and how it all seems to have been thrown away upon her, I cannot but dread lest more sorrow may be in store for you through her."

"Please don't say that, my Lady. It cuts me through. I pray God night and day it may not be so."

Lady Norbury left the cottage, rejoined Constance, and together they went to church. Lady Norbury when seated in her pew and listening to the words of love and goodwill which breathed forth in the service of the sanctuary, little thought of two aching hearts which she had left behind her in that lowly cottage, and how on the

next day it needed all Mr. Leighton's loving gentleness and tender consideration to undo the mischief of her harsh words, lest the bruised reed should be broken and the smoking flax quenched.

CHAPTER V.

“Come labour on !

Who dare stand idle on the harvest plain,
While all around him waves the golden grain ?
And to each servant does the master say,
‘Go work to-day.’

“Come labour on !

Claim the high calling Angels cannot share—
To young and old the Gospel gladness bear :
Redeem the time : its hours too swiftly fly,
The night draws near.

“Come labour on !

The labourers are few, the field is wide,
New stations must be filled and blanks supplied ;
From voices distant, far, or near at home
The call is, ‘Come.’

“Come labour on !

The enemy is watching, night and day,
To sow the tares, to snatch the seed away ;
While we in sleep our duty have forgot,
He slumbered not.

“ Come labour on !

Away with gloomy doubts and faithless fear !
No arm so weak but may do service here ;
By feeblest agents can our God fulfil
His righteous will.

“ Come labour on !

No time for rest till glows the western sky
While the long shadows o’er our pathway lie,
And a glad sound comes with the setting sun—
‘ Servants well done ! ’

“ Come labour on !

The toil is pleasant, the reward is sure,
Blessed are they who to the end endure,—
How full their joy, how deep their rest shall be,
O Lord with thee ! ”

Author of “Hymns from the Land of Luther,”
From “Lyra Anglicana.” Edited by Rev. R. BAYNES.

CECIL’S three years of University life quickly passed away. He had thoroughly enjoyed them. Of a warm and genial disposition himself, he soon made many friends, and few men in his college were more popular than he was. From his childhood he had been accustomed to manly exercises—riding, shooting, cricketing, and the like—and the stroke of the University boat soon persuaded him to train for the honour of being one

of the College eight. He was not a hard reading man, but his regularity at the lectures, and general propriety of conduct, enlisted the dons in his favour. At the end of his curriculum he passed the final examination with credit, and it was not without considerable regret that, after having kept his Master's term, he found himself, for the last time, quitting Oxford for Canondale. It is an era in a man's life. The University is a considerable step beyond school. Greater latitude and independence loosen the reins which have hitherto been firmly held. Happy the man who can look back without sorrow of heart to the first emerging from the thraldom and control of the schoolmaster. But when the newly-made bachelor steps forth from the University, proud in the possession of a white-furred hood, that step ushers him into the world. Henceforth he is his own master. No longer under tutors and governors, but supposed to be able now to stand alone—braced for the battle of life. The leading-

strings are taken off, the course is before him. He is not now *in statu pupillari*, but a man going forth to take his place amongst his fellow-men, and to play a part in the grand drama of life.

Cecil well knew that he had his own way to make in the world. He was not born to wealth, and, happily for him, he would not be able to eat the bread of idleness. His departure therefore from Oxford seemed to usher him into real life. Henceforth there would be a purpose and an object in all that he undertook beyond the mere training of the intellectual powers. Now it would be seen whether the education of his early years had fitted him for the wear and tear of whatever profession he might choose to enter. What was that profession to be? Anxious thoughts from time to time pressed upon him in connection with his future life. The question "What shall I be?" was one which he found it difficult to solve. The army he had long dis-

carded from his thoughts. It is no profession for a poor man dependent on his pay. The law? There was much in its favour. He was not averse to study, was rather fond of critical questions of casuistry. Many of his friends, too, had entered at Lincoln's Inn, or the Temple; but he felt that it required genius to rise above the level of mediocrity at the Bar, and Cecil felt that his own powers were not such as to warrant any very great expectations of success.

Then came the question as to whether he should take Holy Orders. His own inclinations decidedly lay in that direction. Without any burning missionary zeal, he yet felt eager to do something, as God might give him grace, for the souls of his fellow men. He saw how his father was respected and loved in his parish, and what a quiet, happy life of usefulness he led. But then, many of his contemporaries tried to dissuade him from this course. Some openly said that he would shackle himself with the galling bonds of

an effete and decaying system. Others said that, viewed as a profession, there was nothing worse than the Church; that the probability was that he would remain a poor curate to the end of his days, receiving, as his salary, less than the amount paid to his squire's butler. The consequence was that Cecil was rather puzzled, and felt much doubt as to the course which it would be the part of true wisdom to adopt. He felt, however, that his father had given him a general education which would fit him for any post he might be destined to fill; the special training necessary for whatever profession he might choose would come afterwards. The foundation was laid. The superstructure alone remained to be erected.

Cecil had not been long at home after leaving the University, before his father entered with him upon this all-important subject. There was much freedom of intercourse—as there surely always ought to be—between father and son. Cecil had never known what it was to be afraid

of his father. He respected him intensely, but he loved him too. Mr. Leighton had always aimed at being the friend and confidential adviser of his son, had dealt in a kind and loving spirit with the foibles of his earlier years, and now he was reaping the reward of his judicious training in Cecil's hearty yet respectful love.

"Cecil, my boy," said Mr. Leighton one day in the course of a walk with his son, "it is time now that you should definitely make up your mind what profession you will follow. You know that you will not be able to lead an idle life. Indeed, I am quite certain that if your means were much larger than they are you would not wish to do so. But we may set that aside at once. I suppose your inclinations tend either towards the Bar or the Church."

"I am so glad, Father," said Cecil, "that you have broached the subject, for it has been very much upon my mind lately.

I must face the question, and decide for good and all. I was talking to my mother about it last night, and I can see plainly that she is anxious that I should be a clergyman."

" Well, Cecil, I will not deny that both your mother and I should be very thankful if you saw your way clearly to taking Holy Orders. God forbid, however, that I should for one moment urge you to do so unless your own heart prompts you to it. There is nothing more wretched than for a man after he has entered upon the ministry to find that he has mistaken his profession, and tied himself for life by chains which he would fain throw off, but cannot. He commits a grievous sin against God by his hypocrisy, and condemns himself to a life of misery. No, Cecil, much as I should like it, I will not urge you to take Orders. I believe myself that no lot on earth is such a happy lot as that of the pastor of a parish whose heart is really in his work; but then it is for you to say

whether you feel that God calls you to be one of the dressers of His vineyard."

"Indeed, father, I feel the unspeakable importance of my determination. At present my own feelings entirely coincide with yours. I can fancy nothing happier than working as the minister of a parish, really striving to do good to one's fellow creatures; but then there are a good many difficulties through which I cannot as yet clearly see my way. In the first place, it is a serious thing to say that I believe myself inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon myself the office and ministration of a deacon."

"Stop, Cecil! you would never have to say such a thing. The question to which you refer is, 'Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?' and the answer is, 'I trust so.' Now trust is a very different thing from belief. As to the inward

call itself, I am sure that our Church never meant her candidates for Orders to assert that in their own particular case the Spirit had set them apart as chosen vessels to minister before the Lord, and had called them even as Samuel was called of old by the voice of the Lord Himself. I think that a man may with all sincerity of heart answer that first question in the Service for the Ordering of Deacons, if he is seeking to enter into the ministry from no love of ease or filthy lucre, but from an honest desire to be the means under God of bringing souls to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and leading sinners to the Saviour. It surely is no presumption to trust that such a desire is implanted in the heart by God Himself, and that He who hath thus called, will give grace sufficient to enable the ordained man to carry out his earnest resolutions. It will not do to strain these words too far, nor on the other hand must you underrate their undoubted solemnity."

“ Then there is another matter which troubles me a good deal, I mean the question of subscription. There are a great many men in Oxford now who think that the terms of subscription should be very considerably relaxed, that it is cruel to ask a man at the age of twenty-three to express his opinion upon matters of abstruse theology, about which he may very likely in after life change his mind. Remember, Father, I am not saying that these are my opinions. I am merely telling you what men say, and I should like to hear what you think about it all.”

“ Well, Cecil, I am growing an old man, and perhaps, my views are too antiquated for the present day. I will not say that the various subscriptions now required might not with advantage be simplified, because I think they might be ; but of this I am quite sure, that it would never do to relax the terms of subscription. As it is, there is a great variety of opinion included in the Church of England, but it is frightful to think what it

would be without the present requirements of the law. The emancipation of the clergy would be the slavery of the laity. It is absolutely necessary that there should be some guarantee that the doctrines broached in the pulpit shall not be other than compatible with a lawful interpretation of the fixed standards of the Established Church, and this guarantee would be lost if there were no subscription required to the Liturgy and Articles."

"There is another point I want to ask you about, though I do not wish to make too much of it. I have no desire for wealth or high position, but I do not think I should like to remain a curate all the days of my life. And yet, as many say, unless you have good interest, there is very little chance of a man ever obtaining an incumbency."

"I must confess, Cecil, that I think there is a great deal of nonsense talked both about patronage in the Church and about the stipends

of curates. With regard to the latter, you often hear comparisons drawn between a curate's and butler's salary. Grant that they are nearly on an equality. The one is at the top, the other at the bottom of his profession. There is no similarity between a butler's and an archbishop's salary which would be more to the point. There are few professions where a man, from the very moment of entering it, can earn from seventy to one hundred pounds a year. Many a lawyer has to work on for years and years before he has his first brief—many a medical man has terribly uphill work before he can earn his hundred a year, clear. An officer receives little more than interest on the purchase money of his commission, even if he does that. I do not myself think that curates have nearly so much cause to complain on this score as the incumbents of ill endowed benefices, who have risen in their profession, and yet who, with many more calls upon their purse, have, perhaps, a less income to meet them than

they had as curates. Then, too, as to patronage, of course a man with interest in high places has a better chance of preferment than one without interest. It is so in every profession, and from the nature of things will always continue to be so. But I think that a clergyman who is really desirous of giving himself up wholly to his duties, and who is not below the mark with regard to his intellectual powers, is nearly sure to have some opening by which he may obtain preferment. In the present day a man of power and activity soon gets known; his bishop's eye is fixed upon him, and sooner or later I think you will find that it is a very rare thing for a man, who really deserves promotion, to fail in obtaining it. It is natural that you should look forward at some future time to being presented to a living. I do not blame you for it. At the same time, curates too often find the yoke of submission irksome before they are really qualified to accept posts of sole responsibility, and



I hope you will not be one of those who, as soon as their year of diaconate has passed, are restless and discontented in the subordinate position of a curate."

"No, Father, I hope not. I am sure if I do take Orders that it will be with the intention of working hard. I should be ashamed to be a drone in the hive, and earnestly hope that I might be enabled to be of some use to my fellow creatures, and devote my life to the service of my God ; but whether that should be as curate or rector I would try to leave with all humility to the better judgment of those placed over me in the Church."

"Do that, my boy, and you will never regret taking Orders, and God will bless you in your work."

CHAPTER VI.

"'Tis not for man to trifle! Life is brief
And sin is here.

Our age is but the falling of a leaf
A dropping tear.

We have no time to sport away the hours;
All must be earnest in a world like ours.

"Not many lives, but only one have we,
Frail fleeting man!

How sacred should that one life be—
That narrow span!

Day after day filled up with blessed toil;
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil!

"Our being is no shadow of thin air,
No vacant dream;
No fable of the things that never were,
But only seem.

"'Tis full of meaning as of mystery,
Though strange and solemn may that meaning be."

REV. H. BONAR, in "Lyra Anglicana."

Edited by REV. E. BAYNES.

THE conversation recorded in the foregoing
chapter tended much to fix Cecil's determination.



He saw that both his father and mother were anxious that if possible he should take Orders, and this fact in itself led him to smooth over many contingent difficulties which otherwise might have deterred him. Marian, too, was all in favour of his being a clergyman. She laughingly told him that as years rolled on she would come and keep house for him, and cheer him after his day's labour, to which Cecil replied, that he thought it would argue ill for the taste of his own sex if she were left in a position to do that. However, with all parties concerned thus concurring, the point was soon settled. Cecil was to apply himself steadily to a course of theological training, and in due time to look out for a suitable curacy.

This quiet period quickly passed away.

Mr. Leighton's experience and kindly counsel were of the greatest value to his son, and Cecil found in his unrestrained inter-communication of thought with his father the solution of many

vexed questions which had puzzled him during his undergraduate days. At length it became necessary to find a suitable sphere. The pages of the "Ecclesiastical Gazette," the "Record," and the "John Bull," were each in turn anxiously scanned, to see whether any eligible offer presented itself. Little, perhaps, did the framers of the advertisements think how closely their productions would be criticised, or that heresy would be found latent in the incautious use of an epithet, or the equally incautious omission of one. All those which stated that the advertiser required a "fellow-helper of decided piety," were at once set aside as conveying a tacit insult to the clergy in general. Marian was very strong against those which conveyed an intimation that it would be "useless for any to apply, unless holding evangelical views."

"As if each one," she argued, "did not think his own views to be thoroughly evangelical."

Mr. Leighton objected to any Shibboleth—



“Curate wanted, immediately. Baptismal regeneration. Daily service,” at once came under his ban.

Mrs. Leighton was anxious that her son should not be weighted at first starting with an overwhelming population, and it was consequently a matter of much consideration, and some difficulty, to select such an offer as would satisfy the requirements of all concerned.

At length, however, it was determined that a venture should be made. A curate was wanted for a country village in the Lichfield diocese; the incumbent was declared to be of moderate views, while the population, scattered over a somewhat extensive area, numbered only six hundred. Cecil opened communications with the rector, and after two or three preliminary letters an interview was arranged between them. Mr. Leighton was not altogether satisfied with the tone of the correspondence, while at the same time there was nothing of a sufficiently tangible

character to lead him decidedly to oppose any further negotiations.

Cecil accordingly found himself one morning at the railway station, which the advertiser had mentioned as being within a mile and a half of his house. It was a rainy morning, and Cecil looked out somewhat eagerly to see whether Mr. Johnson, the rector, had sent any carriage to meet him. But he looked in vain—no carriage was there. The station was small and insignificant, and there was consequently no possibility of hiring any vehicle, and Cecil therefore had no choice but to start off on his walk to Grantham, (where the curate's offices were required) on foot.

“How far do you call it to Grantham?” said he to the station master.

“How far to Grantham,” replied he, “why about three miles. There is a shorter cut across the fields, which makes the distance about two miles and a half, but if you are a stranger in

these parts, I advise you to keep to the main road, or most likely you would find the short cut the longest in the end."

Rather a disagreeable walk thought Cecil, as the rain came pouring down ; however, there is no help for it now. It would never do for me to turn back at the first difficulty, so here goes.

And forth he stepped bravely into the muddy road.

It is astonishing what an effect the weather has upon the spirits. A clear sky and a shining sun dispel melancholy from the brows of many a care-worn traveller. It is difficult on the other hand to bear up against the dispiriting influences of a steady downpour of rain. Cecil, at any rate, found it so, and his thoughts during his three mile walk were disturbed and anxious. He had a presentiment that his interview would not result in an engagement, and as he turned in at a green gateway which opened up on a short drive, hedged in on each side with evergreens, his heart

sank within him. He was about to submit himself to an ordeal almost more appalling than a college examination. Was he not most foolish thus to have volunteered an interview? But what nonsense! He was a man now, and had no need to be afraid of any one. It was a mere chance that Mr. Johnson was the rector, and he the candidate for Orders. As gentlemen one was as good as the other. It was most childish to feel such nervousness. But, do what he would, he could not argue himself into confidence. He felt like a schoolboy going up to his master to construe his lesson, and in spite of all his arguments his heart beat rapidly and loudly. Delay, however, would only make matters worse, so the bell was rung and the die cast.

A neat servant maid, after a rather lengthened pause, opened the door, and in reply to Cecil's question said that Mr. Johnson was at home, and "would the gentleman walk in."

Cecil accordingly, it must be confessed in a



somewhat sloppy state, entered the rectory, and was shown into the drawing room. By and by Mr. Johnson came into the room. He was a short man, rather inclined to corpulency, with a good deal of whisker allowed to encroach upon the region of the lips. His face was of that circular character which does not ordinarily betoken much mental power or hard study. His eye, as he entered the room, chanced to alight on the too-evident marks of Cecil's progress across the white drugget which was carefully stretched over the carpet, and at once betokened inward dissatisfaction, and foreboded mischief.

"Mr. Leighton, I think? How do you do, sir; sorry I could not send for you to the station to-day, but really if I were to send my carriage for everybody, my horse would have little else to do. Besides, I was not quite sure by what train you would arrive."

"Thank you," said Cecil, rather coldly, "the

station-master gave me clear directions, and I found the way tolerably easily."

"Well," said Mr. Johnson, "the sooner we get to our business the better, so it will be as well if I give you some particulars as to the duties which would devolve upon you if you became my curate. In the first place I must say very decidedly that I do not allow my curate to begin anything in the parish, such as an extra service without my sanction. One curate that I had began a cottage lecture on Wednesday evenings, and then when he left, the people expected that I should keep it on, but I could not possibly pledge myself to be always at home on that particular evening. Besides which I don't approve of these gatherings unauthorised by the Church. The line of demarcation between Church and Dissent should be clearly marked—people are only too apt to slight the regular services if their tastes are pandered to by this semi-Methodism. We have two full services on Sundays. What can the people want more?"

Mr. Johnson paused, as if he expected Cecil to say something, so he replied—

“Wherever my lot may be cast, I certainly should consider it my duty to bow to my rector’s decision in all matters in which I did not feel bound by a higher authority to act in opposition to it.”

Mr. Johnson looked up rather curiously, and examined Cecil from under his overhanging eye-brows, but he could not detect anything further than the words themselves disclosed. So he went on—

“I think I mentioned in one of my letters that the parish is very scattered ; of course this entails a good deal of visiting. My curate has the advantage of my superintendence, experience, and advice, which to a young man just entering the ministry is invaluable. I myself am not able to go about much amongst the cottages. The change from the heated atmosphere of the close rooms of the poor to the outer air is too much for me. Smells, too, affect me very pre-

judicially. It is so different with young people. I believe that the mucus membrane becomes much more irritable and delicate with advancing years. With regard to the Sunday work, I should be ready, unless incapacitated by sickness, to divide the duties. My curate has usually himself taken the Sunday school. It is good practice for a deacon. By the bye, as to doctrine, I suppose you are not a Calvinist?"

Cecil disclaimed the imputation.

Mr. Johnson thereupon expressed himself perfectly satisfied with the interview, and added that he should be very glad to engage Cecil as his curate.

Cecil, whose naturally hot blood had been at boiling heat during the greater part of the time which Mr. Johnson had occupied with his remarks, had some difficulty in restraining himself within due bounds. He saw through the hypocrisy of the man who would not even allow the zeal of his curate to compensate for

his own idleness. He despised the flimsy cloak wherewith Mr. Johnson had endeavoured to hide his own aversion to parochial visitation, and not for one moment did he hesitate as to the course which he should pursue under the circumstances. At length he said—

“My earnest desire, Mr. Johnson, is to find a post where I may labour, as God may give me strength, to rescue from Satan’s thrall souls for which Christ died. In this work to which I propose to devote my life’s best energies, I wish to be guided by one who himself will lead the way, not only on Sundays, but in the scarcely less important daily routine of parochial supervision. I fear that your health would not enable you to do this, and, therefore, without saying more, I beg to decline the offer which you have been good enough to make to me of the curacy of Grantham.”

There was such earnest determination in Cecil’s whole bearing, that Mr. Johnson felt it would be

useless to say another word. The bell therefore was rung, and ere many minutes had elapsed, poor Cecil was once more tramping through the mud to the railway station. The rain still came down in torrents, and his thoughts were none of the brightest as he went along, but he felt a certain relief as he heard the green gate of the rectory grounds shut behind him, and realised that at any rate he was not curate to the self-satisfied drone whom he had left in the drawing-room.

“Better,” thought he, “to be with a man of extreme opinions than with one whose sole idea of clerical duty is how to ‘get through’ the Sunday services without scandal. Give me at any rate earnestness and zeal, whatever else you lack. Souls are perishing around us, and are not to be won back to the fold of their Redeemer by such listless apathy. Thank God I did not close with Mr. Johnson’s offers without a personal interview.”

Cecil returned to his father's house with a heavy heart. The train which was to take him back again did not leave the station till nearly two hours after he had reached it, so he had plenty of time for reflection on all that had passed. It was his first attempt to enter upon the real duties of life, and, to a certain extent, had proved a failure. The thoughts and hopes in connection with his curacy, which since he had answered Mr. Johnson's advertisement had been seldom absent from his mind, were now suddenly dashed to the ground. He had to begin all over again. The newspapers must once more be diligently scanned, and inquiries be made on all sides, and he almost felt as if he himself would be looked upon with suspicion by his friends as, perhaps, unreasonable in his requirements or crotchety in his views. Life had hitherto been to him sunny and genial, and the first check was somewhat hard to be borne.

His father met him as he entered the rectory

grounds at Canondale. No questions were necessary. It was evident at once from the expression of his face that his journey had been fruitless. Mr. Leighton passed his arm through that of his son, and turning with him into the garden, said—

“Well, Cecil, my boy, I see that your first efforts have not been successful, and that I am not to congratulate you on being the future curate of Grantham.”

“No, indeed, Father, you are not,” replied Cecil, “I could hardly have believed it possible that in these days, when so much is done in almost every parish in England, there could have been such a man as Mr. Johnson. He stagnates in his own indolence, and will not even allow others to do the work of which he himself has undertaken the responsibility. I feel now that I ought to have made some more precise inquiries before going to see him, but it has taught me a lesson for the future.”

Cecil then told his father all the particulars of his interview with Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Leighton, fully approving of his son's instant refusal of the curacy, expressed his satisfaction that Cecil would not at any rate have to commence his ministerial career under such an untrustworthy guide as the rector of Grantham.

By tacit consent of all, the subject was dismissed that it might be forgotten.

It was not long before an opening presented itself. Cecil wished, if possible, to avoid advertising for a curacy. "How can you," he urged, "know anything of A. B. who answers my advertisement, which, if it says nothing about me, may be modest but can give little information; if it says much, may give the necessary information, but argues ill for my modesty?" His scruples were rewarded by his father receiving a letter one morning from an old friend, saying that he was in want of a curate, and having heard by accident that Cecil Leighton hoped ere

long to take Orders, thought it not impossible that they might mutually suit each other.

“The very thing for you, Cecil,” said Mr. Leighton, passing the letter to him, at the breakfast table. Mr. Chisholm is a man whom I have not met for some years, but I remember him well, and I have heard since that he is a most active clergyman. His Church views are moderate, rather higher, perhaps, than my own, but still I have every confidence that you would be able to work under him with much comfort and usefulness. The only drawback is, that Silchester is not in this diocese. It is not, however, very far from here, and one must not expect that everything will turn out exactly as one wishes. Read the letter, Cecil, and tell me what you think about it.” It was as follows:—

“Silchester,

“April 12, 18—.

“MY DEAR LEIGHTON,

“I heard accidentally the other day

that your son is looking for a curacy. My present curate will be leaving me before long, and if you do not object to your son's going out of the diocese in which you yourself have been settled, I think it very likely that he and I might suit one another in the somewhat delicate relationship of rector and curate. You know Silchester, and you know me, and it will not therefore be necessary for me to enter into particulars either about the parish or the rector. If you think that either or both would be undesirable, pray say nothing whatever about my proposal, but if you think it likely that we might arrange matters happily together, if you would put your son into communication with me, I would tell him all such particulars as he might wish to know before deciding whether it would be worth his while to come down to Silchester for an interview with me.

“ Believe me,

“ Yours very truly,

“ HARRY CHISHOLM.

“ Rev. B. Leighton.”

“ Well, Father,” said Cecil, “ I like the tone of that letter. Of course if you had not known Mr. Chisholm he would have been likely to say more about his own views as to his curate’s parochial work and position, but he evidently trusts to your knowledge of him as sufficient to assure you that all will be right. At any rate there is no humbug about the letter.”

“ Yes, Cecil, Mr. Chisholm needs no testimonials to character either from his own or any other pen. His ministry at Silchester has been much blessed, and he is indefatigable in his labours, either personally, or by directing and superintending the efforts of others. It would be a great satisfaction to me to see you his curate. I will write to him to-day, and tell him to communicate with you direct at once.”

It will not be necessary to enter into the details of the negotiations which ensued between Mr. Chisholm and Cecil. Suffice to say that they were mutually satisfactory, and that before a fort-

night had elapsed after the receipt of Mr. Chisholm's letter to Mr. Leighton, it was arranged that Cecil's title to Orders should be the curacy of Silchester. The Bishop of —— would hold his ordination on Trinity Sunday, and Cecil was to hold himself in readiness for the Bishop's summons.

CHAPTER VII.

"And where shall mother's bosom find,
With all its deep love-learnèd skill,
A prayer so sweetly to her mind,
As in this sacred hour and still,

"Is wafted from the white-rob'd choir,
Ere yet the pure high-breathèd lay;
'Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire,'
Rise floating on its dove-like way.

"And when it comes, so deep and clear,
The strain, so soft the melting fall;
It seems not to th' entrancèd ear
Less than thine own heart-cheering call,

"Spirit of Christ."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

AND a sad day it was when Cecil left the home of his childhood, with, if the truth must be told, a trembling heart, for the Bishop of ——'s house. He had previously had an interview of a preparatory nature with the Bishop, and nothing could exceed his kindness of manner and gentle words

of encouragement towards him. Still the examination was an ordeal which he dreaded. It would be so terrible a thing to be rejected, much more disgraceful even than a pluck at college would have been. The more he had read, the more insight had he gained into his own state of theological ignorance. Notwithstanding his advantages in being able at all times to consult his father as to his method of reading, yet he had felt much like a sailor at sea without a compass. The field which he had to range over was so vast, that he found it impossible to do more than embrace a very small portion of it. How he longed that the questions on Ecclesiastical History might not be very hard and deep! Other matters would give scope to his imagination, but somehow or other Mosheim had fairly puzzled him (and no wonder); he felt that his knowledge of Ecclesiastical History was in a marvellously confused state. Dates too,—surely the Bishop would not require much chronological knowledge.

What good could it do a working curate to have them all at his finger ends; how would his future ministry amongst souls be the worse for his ignorance of them? Doctrine of course he must expect to have to give his opinion upon; but he did hope that the days of "cram" were passed. Many an hour had he spent in his quiet room at Canondale Rectory studying the latest and best commentaries on Holy Scripture. However, it mattered very little what his thoughts on the subject might be. All these mysteries would very soon be solved by the examination itself. The Bishop had very kindly asked Cecil to sleep at the palace, although if his real feelings on the matter could have been read, it would have been clear that he would have preferred finding a lodging for himself in the neighbouring town. But it was not so to be. Episcopal invitations to would-be-curates are of the nature of royal commands—they cannot be declined. And so Cecil found himself at the Bishop's palace

in company with some five or six others in like circumstances with himself. He only just arrived in time to dress for dinner, and had seen no one before the servant ushered him into the drawing room—an awful moment for any nervous person. A candidate for Orders may well feel abashed at that which the hardest dread. Cecil's fears however were soon removed. The Bishop at once came forward to greet him with a kind and fatherly air. Some sixty winters had gone over his head, and had left their snowy traces in their track. His manner was most dignified, courteous without being familiar. The world at large would not call him handsome; but there was something in his face which you could not fail to admire. You saw at once that you were in the presence of one who was good and holy. You felt drawn towards him as a man of God. His first words to Cecil were calculated to put him at his ease. It was not the examining bishop speaking to a trembling candidate; but

the courteous host welcoming an invited guest.

“ Well, Mr. Leighton, I am glad to see you here, and to make your acquaintance. It is very many years since I had the pleasure of seeing your father ; but I well remember him in times now long gone by, and I am very glad of the opportunity which enables me to make his son’s acquaintance. Let me introduce you to Mrs. —.”

The Bishop’s wife was tall and graceful, with thin features, but delicate looking. She, too, welcomed Cecil with much cordiality, and altogether he felt a great deal more at his ease than he feared he should have done.

Dinner passed off without much incident. The two examining chaplains formed the only addition to the Episcopal party, the rest were either candidates for deacons’ or priests’ orders. There was not much conversation. The minds of all seemed preoccupied with one subject, which nevertheless was rather carefully avoided.

Cecil felt somewhat relieved, when, shortly after dinner was over, the whole party were summoned to the library for family prayers, and the evening came to a close. Shall we follow Cecil to his room? He would not have lost caste had you done so. It was a warm spring night in May, and long did he gaze out of his window, trying to pierce the starry firmament above, and solve some of the many mysteries which now worked in his mind. Those stars! were they, too, worlds like ours, inhabited by beings of like nature with ourselves? If so, had sin reached them, too? or were they still pure, as our first Father made them in His own image? or might they be the future abodes of the redeemed of the Lord? If so, would he find a place there, and (oh, wondrous thought!) would any souls saved through his instrumentality be his crown of rejoicing at that day? He left the open window, and took up his Bible. His mother had given it to him as a parting gift. He looked at the first page. The words—

“CECIL LEIGHTON, from his loving Mother,
May, 18—Heb. xiii, 20, 21. 2 Tim. iv, 1-5.”
met his eye. He turned to the passages, and
with the holy influences of a mother’s love
softening his heart, pondered long and earnestly
on the solemn words—

“Now the God of peace, that brought again
from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shep-
herd of the sheep, through the blood of the
everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every
good work to do His will, working in you
that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through
Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and
ever. Amen.” Heb. xiii, 20, 21.

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the
Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and
the dead at His appearing and his kingdom ;

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of
season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-
suffering and doctrine.

“For the time will come when they will not en-

endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” 2 Tim. iv, 1-5.

True and hearty were Cecil's prayers that night that the God of grace would pour down upon him His richest blessings, enabling him to be in deed and in truth a faithful ambassador of Christ, and that whilst making full proof of his ministry, he might not be without a well grounded trust that his labours were not in vain in the Lord. It was late before he closed his eyes in sleep. Sleep on Cecil ! your heart is right and true. High are your hopes, honest your longings to be a faithful servant of your Lord and Master. Would that there were many more such standard-bearers in the army of their God !

The three days during which the examination was held passed rapidly away. Cecil's fears with reference to the issue of it proved totally unfounded; on the contrary he passed it with considerable credit, and in his interview with the Bishop, he was much cheered by the evident sincerity and kindness with which he welcomed him as a fellow-worker with himself in the diocese—"We serve the same Master—to Him alike we stand or fall—the officer and the private contend with the same enemy, though the one be the ruler and the other the ruled—the tie therefore that joins a bishop to his clergy is of the very closest character. I trust that in our future intercourse together, we may never either of us lose sight of this fact. Do not look upon me as a mere sergeant of police, make me your friend, consult me in your parochial difficulties, and I can at any rate promise you my most earnest attention and advice. I pray that God Himself may make you a faithful ambassador of Christ, and bless you in your ministry." These

♦

words sank deep into Cecil's heart. His nervous system was highly wrought, and the tears coursed down his cheeks from sheer emotion and excitement. The good Bishop saw that enough had been said, and closed the interview.

On the day following his ordination, Cecil returned to Canondale. His rector had said that he should not require his services till about the middle of the week, and Cecil was very glad of a few days' quiet at his old home, before going forth to his new and responsible duties. Yes—his old home. He felt that it had come to that. He must look upon his curacy as his home. He was now fairly launched on life's voyage, had left the river's banks and the pilot's fostering guidance, and must henceforth depend upon himself. And yet a voice whispered to his heart, "You are not alone, lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the

waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Thou shalt be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." And Cecil's heart was comforted. He felt his own weakness, the guarantee and only source of real spiritual strength.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.
Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul
Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own,
Paul should himself direct me: I would trace
His master-strokes, and draw from his design.
I would express him simple, grave, sincere;
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,
And plain in manner, decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impressed
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too; affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men."

COWPER.

THE year of Cecil's diaconate passed quickly away. It served to remove many fears which time proved to be imaginary, but it served also

to make him aware of many points of weakness of which before he had been wholly unconscious. Work was the order of the day. The apprentice had to learn his trade, the unskilled in composition had to provide pabulum weekly for his flock, the sick had to be ministered unto, the school had to be visited, and there was always looming in the dim distance the examination for Priests' Orders. When first Cecil went to Silchester he had looked forward to much quiet time for reading. He was determined that it should be done systematically. So much time was to be given to Ecclesiastical History, so much to the critical study of the Greek Testament, so much to Butler and Hooker, so much to reading of a more distinctly pastoral character. Not an hour was to be lost. All was to be mapped out and move on with the regularity of clockwork. But Cecil forgot one important item in his calculations. He forgot that his time would not be at his own disposal, and that he would be liable at all times,

however inconvenient it might be to himself personally, to be called from his books by some parochial business. It must be confessed that after some strenuous efforts, he was obliged to give up all steady, systematic study. It was all he could do to find time to read sufficient for his Sunday sermon. The composition alone of his sermon, with the necessary preparation, occupied almost the whole of the short two hours which he was able to devote to this object each morning. "Is it always to go on like this?" thought Cecil. "Am I always to be running after a time of leisure and repose? Is it always to be in the hazy future, a will-o'-the-wisp, luring me on but eluding my grasp when I seem to approach it. Will my sermon always hang over my unlucky head as an incubus till the last sheet is done, and the Sibylline leaves stitched up? And then the mill-horse work begins again. No sooner is the sermon finished than it is preached—the remembrance of it is not very cheerful—

and then the same difficulty recurs. No sooner have I rolled the ball up-hill but it comes down again, and the work has to be renewed. Will it be so to the end of my ministry? Oh, critics, keen and jaundiced, how little ye know of the pains and throes, the head-ache and the heart-ache which each Sunday's sermon costs your young curate?"

No one, I may venture to say, detected that such thoughts were burning in Cecil's breast. He did not allow them for a moment to discourage or turn him aside from the path he had chalked out for himself. At the same time it must be confessed that there was much to try his temper. Silchester was a town of between three and four thousand people, and all those, to whom a perfect state of health was denied, had from time immemorial looked upon the curate as their own personal property. His time was to be at their disposal, his sympathy always ready, his kind word and look ever at their command. None

are so exacting or utterly regardless of the value of time as the sick poor. Cecil soon found this out to his cost. Picture him to yourself as having just settled down after breakfast. His Bible lies open before him. He has looked out the lessons for the next Sunday, and is pondering which of two selected texts may prove most suitable for his congregation. A knock is heard at the door.

“Come in.”

A young girl, of about seventeen years of age, opens it sufficiently to admit a pair of cheeks, shining and very red, and says—

“Please, sir, Eliza Jennings hopes you will go down and see her as soon as you can. She is very bad this morning, and the doctor’s stuff has done her no good.”

“Very well, Emma, tell whoever she has sent that I will look in upon her in the course of the day.”

The door shuts, the red cheeks go downstairs,

and for a short space quiet reigns in Cecil's room.

He has just made a final selection of his text, and is beginning to think of the arrangement of his sermon, when another 'knock disturbs his thoughts.

"Come in."

The red cheeks, with no body apparent, are seen again.

"What is it, Emma?"

"If you please, sir, Mary Gandell wants to know whether you have written about her brother's prize money, and whether you have got it, and whether she can have it?"

This necessitates the curate having an interview with Mary Gandell. Explanations have to be entered into. Mary Gandell must be told as unreproachfully as possible that the War Office is hard to move—that it takes a long time to settle prize money matters, that doubtless letters from all parts of the country on similar affairs

inundate the War Office each morning, that at any rate it would not do to write again just yet, it might anger the War Office. This abstraction has a grand and forbidding and somewhat alarming sound, and in time Mary Gandell "supposes she's no help for it," and leaves Cecil once more in quiet waters. Sermon again. Two first heads arranged, but some doubts as to whether there should be a third division, or "finally." This requires some little thought. Would there be enough matter for twenty-five minutes?

Before this point is definitely settled, the red cheeks appear at the door again. This time the message is different.

"Please sir, Mr. Chisholm has sent down to know if you can go up to the rectory. He wants very particular to see you on business."

This of course necessitated the postponement of the sermon for the rest of the morning. Cecil regretted it the less when he saw, as he emerged from his lodgings, a figure slowly walking up

the middle of the street, dragging along an apparently unwilling child. A picture on the front of the man, roughly painted, was evidently intended to horrify the passer-by with the sense of the dangers to which he had been exposed through a colliery explosion. Cecil knew that he would have been destined, had he remained at home, to have heard for the next half-hour the details of the catastrophe drawled out in the most painfully nasal twang, and that all study at any rate for that morning would, under any circumstances, have been out of the question.

He hurried up to the rectory, not the least aware of the nature of the business for which his rector had summoned him. He was a frequent visitor there, as in duty bound as curate of Silchester. Mr. Chisholm's house was decidedly cheerful. It stood in the High street of the town, a little retired behind its fellows, with green posts and swinging chains in front to keep the vulgar from a too close approach. It had a

well-to-do appearance about it, and evidently was conscious of its own dignity. The bay windows on each side of the door seemed of a portly character, and gave the passer-by the notion of well-polished mahogany within, and of a cheerful party oftentimes gathered round it. And the notion would not have been far beside the truth. No one was more generally hospitable than Mr. Chisholm, no one was more respected, far or near, than he was. He had been for many years the highly valued rector of the town, and, although now he felt himself obliged to delegate some of his duties to younger men than himself, yet everybody knew that if advice was wanted, or there were a difficulty to be solved, the rector was the man to give the advice or solve the difficulty.

Cecil invaded the precincts of the rectory, and rang the bell. Only curates' maids have red cheeks. The rector's man-servant who opened the door, had lived with him for many years, and

was considered as part and parcel of the establishment.

"Is your master in, John?" said Cecil, as the door was opened.

"Yes, sir, he is in the study, and expecting you I know. Walk in, sir."

"How do you know he wants to see me," said Cecil, who began to feel a little uncomfortable.

"Because, sir, he told me so, and that if you happened to call when he was out, I was to ask you to come in and sit down, and say that he would be back again in a minute."

"What can he want me for so very particularly," thought Cecil, "I hope no one has been making any complaint of me. Now I think of it, in one part of my sermon, yesterday, I am sure I saw Miss Robbins taking notes and looking rather vexed. I expect I am too much of an Arminian to please her. But I cannot help it. I must preach the truth as I find it, and perhaps one day a Calvinist will

blame me, and the next day an Arminian will pull me up. Yes, I suspect it is Miss Robbins."

However, if Miss Robbins had made any complaint it was not apparent in Mr. Chisholm's face or manner.

Nothing could possibly be more cordial than his greeting.

"Ah, Leighton, I am so glad my servant found you at home, and that you were able to come up here, for I want to talk to you about a little matter. Just take a chair for a few minutes while I finish this letter, and then I shall be at leisure."

Cecil took up the newspaper, but his thoughts wandered hither and thither. He narrowly scanned Mr. Chisholm's face, but could see there no traces of Miss Robbins' Calvinism or Arminianism.

"Done at last," exclaimed Mr. Chisholm, as he put the letter which he had been writing into

the letter box on his table. "Done at last, and now, Leighton, I want a word with you."

Cecil put down the newspaper, and strove to nerve himself for whatever emergency might arise.

"The fact is," said Mr. Chisholm, "that you have now been working really hard for three months, and I think I can see that a little change would be good for you in every way. I had a letter this very morning from an old college friend, offering to come and pay me a long-promised visit. I have just answered his letter, saying how glad I shall be to welcome him and that he must put a sermon or two in his portmanteau, as I intend to send my curate home for a fortnight's holiday. What say you, Leighton, to this plan?"

All thoughts of Miss Robbins had passed from Cecil's mind, and he accepted the offer so frankly made with real pleasure.

"It is most good of you, Mr. Chisholm, to

have thought of such an arrangement. I need hardly say that I shall most gladly avail myself of your kindness. As to my wanting a holiday, I don't think very much of that—but as to my liking one, there is no doubt that I should enjoy it amazingly.”

“Well, Leighton, don't hesitate about it. I daresay your father and mother won't require any previous announcement of your visit.”

Cecil smiled.

“Oh, no, I have no fear of not having a warm welcome. If you have nothing special for me to attend to, I would start at once.”

“Do so, Leighton, and I heartily hope you will enjoy your holiday to the full. You have thoroughly well earned it. Do not trouble yourself about the first Sunday after your return. I will take both sermons.”

Cecil left the rectory with a light heart. His three months had been months of really unceasing work, and he was beginning to

feel fagged, and that he wanted a little change. He had not, however, liked to ask for a holiday so soon, and Mr. Chisholm's offer, therefore, had taken him wholly by surprise. It was not long before his little black portmanteau was duly packed, and Cecil hurrying as fast as iron and water could carry him in the direction of Canon-dale.

CHAPTER IX.

" Love is a plant of holier birth
Than any that takes root on earth ;
A flower from Heaven which 'tis a crime
To number with the things of time;
Hope in the bud is often blasted,
And beauty on the desert wasted ;
And joy, a primrose, early, gay,
Care's lightest foot-fall treads away.

" But love shall live, and live for ever,
And chance and change shall reach it never.
Can hearts in which true love is plighted
By want or woe be disunited ?
Ah, no ! like buds on one stem born,
They share between them e'en the thorn
Which round them dwells, but parts them not,
A lorn but undivided lot.

" Can death dissever love, or part
The loved one from the lover's heart ?
No, no ! he does but guard the prize
Sacred from mortal injuries,
Making it purer, holier seem,
As the ice closing o'er the stream,
Keeps, while storms ravage earth and air,
All baser things from mingling there."

HENRY NEELE.

CECIL's welcome at Canondale was unfeignedly hearty. Both his father and mother, and Marion, too, had missed him more perhaps than they would have liked to have confessed even to each other. It was different when he had been at Oxford. True, his absence then had been of considerable length, but there had always been a definite time to look forward to when they might hope to see him at home for the vacation. Now he seemed to have left them for good and all. They had none of them liked to hint even at asking Mr. Chisholm for a holiday, and although when Cecil wrote, as he had frequently done lately, of bad headaches and general lassitude, Mrs. Leighton had longed to urge him to come to Canondale for "a clergyman's week," yet Mr. Leighton had been firm upon the point.

"Don't let Mr. Chisholm," he had said, "once get hold of the idea that he has got a valetudinarian for a curate. If you are always wanting to wrap up Cecil in cotton wool, you will make



his rector regret that he ever offered his curacy to the son of his old friend. No, no, trust Mr. Chisholm. He will send Cecil away for a holiday if he sees he really wants it."

And the sequel proved that Mr. Leighton judged his friend rightly. No holiday had been asked for, and was therefore all the more welcome.

"And now, Cecil," said Marion after dinner, "do tell us something about the Silchester people. Your letters have been full of work and details for Papa, but you have hardly told us anything of your neighbours, and yet you know that they are your parishioners, and so of course we want to know about them."

"Well," said Cecil, "where shall I begin? The doctors, the lawyers, the retired military men, the old maids—which is it you want to hear about, for we have specimens of each genus at Silchester."

"Tell us about them all, for we want to follow

you in your daily life, and we cannot do so unless we know something of the people with whom you are brought in contact."

"To begin with then, I would say that Silchester must be supposed to be a very unhealthy place for we have four doctors to cure us when we require medical aid. Happily I have not yet been obliged to call in any doctor, and so I am good friends with all; but I suppose the time will come when I shall mortally offend three out of the four, because I cannot employ more than one. And which it will be I have not yet the least idea. The aristocratic doctor of the place is quite a picture. He is a little round man, not above five feet four inches high, always dresses in black clothes with an irreproachable and very deep white neckcloth, wears his watch in his fob with a long chain attached, at the end of which are two or three large old-fashioned seals. His face is like the full moon, shining, lustrous, beaming with good humour, apparently at peace

with all the world. His words come forth as from an oracle, and he is a bold man who ventures to oppose Mr. Thistlewaite. Then at the other end of the medical scale there is Mr. Grigson. I hardly know whether Mr. Thistlewaite and Mr. Grigson would be asked to meet one another at dinner. The fortune of the one is made. The other lives from hand to mouth. This makes a great difference in the Silchester world, as I suppose it does everywhere else. Mr. Grigson is the parish doctor, and if you were to go to his surgery at ten o'clock in the morning you would see it besieged by a crowd of applicants looking woe-begone and sickly. He himself is not a man of a cheerful countenance, thin, tall and lank. He looks at you a little suspiciously as if you did not mentally give him the respect which he himself considers to be his due. I can't say the poor people like him, but then I think they are very exacting, and forget that he has to attend to them and doctor them for the

splendid salary of £150 a year. I really think poor parish doctors are worse off than poor curates. I won't describe the other two doctors, for you must have had enough of it, I should think."

"Tell us about some of the ladies of your flock," said Marion. "I am rather anxious to hear about them."

"I should have enough to do if I were to tell you about many of them! You never saw such a set as they are. I really hardly dare speak of them, for walls have ears. I can assure you that at Silchester I am most prudent and circumspect, and keep my own counsel strictly. I suppose it is the same in all small country towns, but you would be amazed if you knew how exceedingly venomous and spiteful, and full of prejudice some of the elderly ladies are. There are some grand exceptions, but the temper of most of them seems to have been soured in early youth, and not to have recovered itself in their later years. If you

could but see the two Miss Robbins' you would know what I meant. They are good ladies who have sufficient income to keep them in tolerable comfort. Having nothing to do, they think it their duty to try to reform their poorer neighbours. Now of course I don't want to say a word against them for this. I should be the last man to do so, on the contrary, I honour them for their good intentions. But the more I see of parish work, the more convinced I am that to work for God amongst the poor is not so easy a matter as many seem to think it. The Miss Robbins' go and visit in their district for very much the same reason that a fashionable lady takes her drive in the park in London—for something to do. They are utterly ignorant of the way to set about the work, make it apparent to those whom they visit that it is a great act of condescension on their part, and scold, scold, scold till the poor people heartily wish they had never taken it into their heads to become district visitors.

I am sure they mean it kindly, for they are ready enough with their soup, or their blankets, or their pudding, but what the poor want is loving sympathy, not a scolding harangue, and I am sure that the Miss Robbins' might as well stay at home, as far as any spiritual good they may do is concerned. But I must not go on in this way, or you will think I am back-biting my own parishioners. Come, you have not told me anything yet of Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury. Are they at Oakwood Park, and is all going on much as usual?"

Mr. Leighton was not sorry that the conversation should not go on much longer in this strain. He had not liked to stop Cecil, knowing that for months his thoughts had been pent up in his own breast, and that the very expression of them to others would probably have the effect of dissipating the ill humours; but he was glad to change the subject, and answered at once—

“Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury, and Constance

are all at home, and I am sure they will be delighted to see you. It was only about a week ago that Sir Lionel was asking me about you, saying how glad he should be to see you again, and that he hoped you would not come home without going up to call upon them at Oakwood, so we will go up there to-morrow the first thing after breakfast."

It must be confessed that Cecil looked forward to this visit with no little anxiety. During his early years he had been much thrown into the company of Constance Norbury. Living in the same village, it was impossible but that they should often meet. He had known her as a child, called her Constance all his life, and played with her almost every day. Then came his college days, and he had not been able to conceal from himself that when he came home for his vacations, the thought that he should again see Constance had added not a little to the joyous anticipations of his return to Canondale. He had never, however, really scrutinized his own feelings, and, boy-

like, had been content to enjoy the pleasure of being with her without ever thinking whether such frequent intimacy might not be dangerous both for him and for Constance herself. Since, however, he had been at Silchester, these transient feelings had assumed a graver aspect. He was now separated from Canondale altogether; he could no longer look forward to regular and periodical visits there, and his thoughts and hopes in connection with Constance began, almost insensibly to himself, to take a form and shape which they hitherto had not done. He was almost startled one day to find how constantly his day-dreams centered round Oakwood. If he sat down in his arm chair he would wake up after a time and then become aware that Constance had been the foremost object of those dreams. What was she doing now? had she altogether forgotten him? did the days when they were so constantly together ever come back to her memory with regret? But then, supposing this was so, what would Sir Lionel

and Lady Norbury say? Sir Lionel, perhaps, might be won over, but Lady Norbury! He remembered his youthful terror of her, how his heart almost sank within him at her very approach, and how awkward and nervous he had always felt himself to be in her presence. Surely she would scout the idea of him as a son. A son! Then it had come to this. He really had visions of Constance as his future wife, and really built castles in the air peopled with happy faces and loving hearts! A day-dream it was, very pleasant at the time, but day-dreams fade away, and the realities of life are sometimes harder to bear if we allow ourselves to be beguiled into the enjoyment of them. The mirage of the desert often leads on unwary travellers; exhausted through want of water they hurry on with eager steps to what has the appearance of a beautiful lake in the distance; their spirits rise, their languor passes away, they reach the spot—and the lake is gone! It existed only in their own imagination.

Take care, Cecil, lest the hopes which now are luring you on, should, like the mirage of the desert, vanish into thin air and leave behind only vexation and regret !

The morrow came, and with it the promised visit to Oakwood. The whole party went up there at about mid-day with the hopes of finding Sir Lionel, Lady Norbury, and Constance at home. Nor were their hopes disappointed. Lady Norbury and Constance were in the drawing room, and Sir Lionel soon came in from his study. They were all much astonished to see Cecil, having heard nothing whatever of his arrival at the rectory. It must be confessed that a cloud passed over Lady Norbury's face when she saw him. It had not been without much foreboding of evil that she had observed the constant and increasing intimacy between Constance and Cecil. Great had been her anxiety as to what was really the wisest course to pursue. Probably absence would cure the whole matter, she thought, and to talk

to Constance on the subject might, perhaps, only put thoughts into her head which had never been there before. Besides which, Cecil, the penniless son of their rector, and a mere curate with no particular prospect of preferment at present, would surely never think of falling in love with Constance, her daughter, the heiress of Canondale. It could not be. No, Lady Norbury, Cecil would not have thought of falling in love with Constance. Men don't fall in love by thinking of it. They fall in love *without* thinking of it. Reason, wisdom, prudence, propriety may all point one way, but if love take the reins into his own hand, he refuses at once to be guided by such trivial matters as these! Lady Norbury, therefore, was very glad when, as she thought, Cecil was well out of the way at Silchester, and now was proportionably vexed to see him enter the room as in old times with his father and mother and Marion. As in old times! And yet there was a change which frightened Lady Norbury. She

could not hide from herself the fact that Cecil was no longer a boy, but a Christian gentleman. His dress was very becoming to him. There was no peculiar cut about it, denoting orthodoxy or heresy, as the case might be; it was simply the quiet dress of a country clergyman. And how manly he looked! His manners were so formed, neither forward nor shy. Lady Norbury felt at once that Constance would be in great danger. Hence it was that a frown passed over her face as Cecil entered the room. But it quickly passed away, for Lady Norbury felt it was necessary to control her feelings. She greeted him kindly, expressed her surprise at seeing him at Canondale when she thought he was at Silchester, and hoped that he continued to like his curacy as his father had told her he had done when he first went there. Cecil said all that was necessary in reply, and then turned to Constance. He thought—it might be his mistake—that her colour heightened when first she saw him. Perhaps it was only natural

that the sight of any unexpected friend should have that effect upon her. At any rate her greeting of him was perfectly natural and unembarrassed. She held out her hand to him frankly, and warmly expressed her pleasure at seeing him once more. Cecil knew not what to say in reply. His heart was full to overflowing, but he could hardly speak. His head seemed to swim, and if Lady Norbury had not come to the rescue he hardly knew what he should have done or said. He was really grateful to her for interposing—the first time in his life he had been so—and making it unnecessary for him to say anything.

“I think Silchester seems to agree with you, for I never saw you look better,” said Lady Norbury.

Now Cecil had come home as it were upon sick leave, and hardly liked to be thus congratulated upon his good looks. However, he was too glad to be extricated from his difficulty to resent

the remark, and simply replied "that everybody said Silchester was a very healthy place." These few words just gave him time to recover himself, and by a strong effort he mastered his feelings during the rest of the visit so effectually as to make Constance remark when they left the room—

"Cecil does not seem at all changed, Mamma. He is as nice as ever."

"Well, my dear. He never was a very great favourite of mine. I dare say you will hardly see him again while he is at Canondale, but if you do, I think you had better leave off calling him Cecil."

"What, and call him Mr. Leighton? That would sound funny. It would look as if I had quarrelled with him."

"I do not think so. It seems very much out of place to hear you call one another by your Christian names, as if you were children. I would much rather you did not do so."

Lady Norbury could hardly have said anything

more injudicious. Hitherto Constance had looked upon Cecil as her old playmate, and never for a moment had she regarded him in any other light. But now Lady Norbury's few words had awakened thoughts of which before she had been utterly unconscious. It was true that she and Cecil had both now put away childish things, and that they could not any longer meet as of yore on the common ground of childish companionship. But must it be Mr. Leighton and Miss Norbury? That would sound so very absurd. She would surely laugh as she said the words, and that would be worse than anything. And yet could it be Cecil and Constance? Certainly not, after what her mother had said. And yet she wished it might be so. Heartily did she long for the old days to come back again, when without a thought, or pang, or question, she had played with Cecil and Marion at the rectory, and joined them in their rides. But no, it could not be—the sands of time's hour-glass

run quickly down. Childhood passes away, and cares come on apace. Hitherto they had seemed to pass by Constance Norbury unassailed. Her life had been sunshine, but previous sunshine only makes the clouds appear the darker when they veil the heavens !

CHAPTER X.

"In little things of common life,
There lies the Christian's noblest strife—
When he does conscience make
Of every thought and throb within,
And words and looks of self and sin
Crushes for Jesus' sake.

"And all the while no glory sees
Save in his own infirmities,
Which magnify the grace—
That out of weakness strength can bring,
And give so low and vile a thing
In God's high work a place.

MONSELL.

AND it was even so! Quickly did the clouds gather in the heavens, which for so long a time had been bright and clear for Constance Norbury. Heavily and gloomily were they massed together, and soon the storm burst furiously upon her.

It will easily be imagined after the revelations

which have been made in the last chapter, that the storm proceeded from that quarter of the heavens which was in the direction of the rectory. Cecil could no longer now disguise from himself that Constance Norbury was an essential element in his visions of future happiness. All seemed to centre round her. He suddenly awoke to the knowledge of the fact that she had been much more to him than he had even liked to confess to himself. The anticipation of seeing her had made his heart beat faster than was its wont. Constantly had the thought been present to his mind at Silchester that his work there would be ten-fold easier, and certainly much more likely to be productive of good to his parishioners, if he could but persuade Constance to be his helpmeet and fellow worker. These visions had floated dimly in his mind, but they now were no longer shadows, but consistent realities.

It was not long before he opened out his whole heart to his father. Mr. Leighton was not

surprised to hear his son's confession. Both he and Mrs. Leighton had seen the feeling of intimacy between their son and Constance gradually ripening into something warmer and deeper. They could have wished it had not been so, but feared lest any opposition on their part might only hasten that end which they were anxious to avoid. When, therefore, Cecil told his father that he felt deeply that his whole future happiness depended upon whether Constance would or would not consent to become his wife, Mr. Leighton at once said that he was not at all surprised to hear him say so, and that for some time he had suspected the state of the case to be as Cecil described it.

This was a great relief to Cecil. It was not necessary for him to enter into such minute details as otherwise it might have been. But still Mr. Leighton foresaw that there would be great difficulties in the way. Personally, he told Cecil, no one could be more acceptable or

agreeable than Constance. It would be a real source of joy, both to Mrs. Leighton and himself to welcome her into their family as a daughter. He had always loved her from her childhood, and thought that Cecil could not have made a better choice. Marion had always looked upon her and loved her as a sister. But then unfortunately the final decision did not rest with them. Even if Constance was willing to accept Cecil's offer, what would Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury say? They might well look to the highest and noblest of the land for a husband for their daughter! Would they be content that their cherished idol should give herself up to one whose worldly prospects were poor in comparison to what she might fairly look forward to? Lady Norbury was certainly of a proud disposition, and it did not seem at all likely to him that she would consent in any way to such a marriage. Cecil had his father's full sanction, hearty approbation, most cordial wishes, but he must not

raise his hopes too high; for Mr. Leighton much feared that Lady Norbury would positively and decidedly object to give up her daughter to him.

Cecil felt the truth of all this most bitterly. It was just what reason had whispered into his ear that morning before his interview with his father. Once it came into his mind, "Why had nature dealt thus hardly with him? Why was nobility denied him? What right had the world to put him on a different platform to the Norburys?"

But these were only passing thoughts, dismissed almost before they were entertained. His better self soon regained the mastery. At the same time he felt that without doubt his case was hopeless, unless he moved in the matter. A positive refusal would not make the matter worse than the present doubt and uncertainty. Nay, it seemed to him that any certainty would be better than what he was at present suffering. Better to be refused and know the worst

than to live on in doubt and anxiety. His father and mother both agreed in this view of the case, and accordingly Cecil determined to open out his whole heart to Sir Lionel. He felt it his duty to mention the matter to him before he spoke to Constance herself, and he knew that he should have less difficulty in speaking to Sir Lionel than to Lady Norbury. At best, however, it would be an awful interview, and heartily did he wish it over.

No sooner was his mind made up, than he started for Oakwood, happily found Sir Lionel at home and disengaged, and was very soon closeted with him in his study.

An hour after he was back again at the rectory, and found his father and mother, and Marion, who could not be kept out of the secret, most eager to hear the result of his interview with the squire. Cecil could not say it had been satisfactory. He had found Sir Lionel most kind and considerate, as he always was. But Cecil's pro-

position evidently took him by surprise. Constance was very young, and he had never thought of Cecil as anything beyond the pleasant and agreeable companion of her childhood. Perhaps it was foolish of him not to have had his eyes more widely open, but to say the truth such an idea had never once entered his mind. He had hardly yet looked upon Constance as other than a child. Certainly he had never thought of her as likely to be more to Cecil than a playmate of early days. In a matter of this kind he must of course speak both to Lady Norbury and to Constance herself. He did not think either of them had ever looked upon Cecil in any other light than he himself had done. Certainly nothing had ever passed between them on the subject. However, he would speak to them, and let Cecil know as soon as possible what they felt on the matter. Cecil added that on parting Sir Lionel had said most kindly, but very earnestly—

“Don’t raise your hopes, Cecil, for I much

fear that such a thing is wholly out of the question."

This was exactly what Mr. and Mrs. Leighton had expected. They urged Cecil most strongly to make up his mind to a refusal, for they could not in their consciences think that any other termination could be looked for.

"While there is life there is hope," said Cecil, "and until the refusal comes, I shall cling to the hope that Constance Norbury may yet be my wife."

The hours of the day passed slowly on. Cecil's eyes were constantly fixed upon the clock and to him the hands seemed to linger in a most unwonted manner on their course. He found it impossible to settle down to anything, and was ever watching the road which led to Oakwood, hoping and yet dreading to see the well-known form of a messenger. At last the messenger came. Cecil put a strong restraint upon himself and remained quietly in the drawing-room until

the servant brought in a note directed in Sir Lionel's handwriting to himself.

He could not trust himself to open it downstairs, and at once therefore sought his own private room. He locked the door behind him, sat down at the table with the note before him, and then, much as he had longed for this moment, he hardly dared to open it. He turned it round and round, scanned every letter of the address, hoping to find some comfort there. But the carefully written words—

“The Rev. Cecil Leighton,
Canondale Rectory.”

could not be twisted either to an acceptance or a refusal of his offer.

At last he broke the seal. The letter was as follows :—

“Oakwood Park, Canondale,
“August 13th, 18—.

“MY DEAR CECIL,

“You will have gathered, I think,

from our interview this morning, that your proposition took me completely by surprise. I can honestly say so. I had never once thought of you as a suitor for my daughter's hand. Immediately after you had left the house I went to Lady Norbury and told her all that had passed between us. She was not so much surprised as I had been, for it appears that for some little time she had thought that your manner towards our daughter was more marked than perhaps it ought to have been. Indeed at one time she thought of speaking to me on the subject, but then you went away to Silchester, and she did not want to cause any unnecessary disquiet. She hardly expected, however, that matters had gone so far as it now appears they have done. We both of us much regret that it has been so, for we feel that we could not consistently with our duty to our daughter give our sanction to your speaking to her on the subject at all. We have always shown ourselves ready to welcome you

here as a friend and companion, and as such, if you can sufficiently command your feelings, we shall still be glad to see you. More than this we cannot say. We thank you for your kind feelings as expressed towards our daughter, but both Lady Norbury and I are convinced that we are furthering the real happiness of both of you by declining to give our sanction to the forming of any closer tie between you. We think on the whole that it will be best that you should not come up to Oakwood again during your present stay at Canondale. With every good wish for your future welfare and happiness, both from Lady Norbury and myself,

“ Believe me,

“ Yours very truly,

“ LIONEL NORBURY.

“ The Rev. Cecil Leighton.”

Cecil drew one long deep sigh. The hopes of months were rudely dashed to the ground. The

castles in the air vanished. His future seemed dark and dreary. Sir Lionel, he thought, might have spared himself the trouble of writing the last sentence. There was no chance whatever of his troubling them at Oakwood. He would at once go back to Silchester. Would that he had never opened his lips upon the subject! And yet when he read Sir Lionel's letter over again it struck him that there was nothing said about Constance herself. Sir Lionel did not even say whether he or Lady Norbury had mentioned the matter to her. And yet surely they would hardly have definitely refused his offer without putting the whole matter before Constance. And if they had done so, how had she received it? Not a word was said about her feelings. Not a syllable was breathed as to what her wishes were. It was all Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury. *They* could not assent—*they* could not give their sanction—*they* did not think it would be for their daughter's happiness—*they* regretted that

matters had proceeded so far—*they* did not wish for the forming of any closer tie. But what about Constance? Her name was hardly mentioned. Certainly her wishes on the subject were studiously kept in the background. Could it be the fact that she had not been altogether averse to his proposal? Dare he hope that she looked upon him more favourably than Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury, and that if her wishes had been consulted and followed the answer would have been different? He hardly knew what to think. One thing was clear. There was Sir Lionel's plain and distinct answer. Sir Lionel was Constance's father and rightful protector, and not by any word of his would he endeavour to undermine his authority over his daughter; whether he were worthy of being Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury's son or not, they should at any rate never be able to say that he acted otherwise than a gentleman. Those who had a right to speak for Constance had said nay, and he would

accept the answer in good faith, as a man and as a Christian.

His father and mother were full of sympathy for him. Marion was rather angry about it all. She thought it would have been the happiest thing possible for Constance to have married Cecil, and gone to live with him at Silchester. But then she was young and foolish, ignorant of the ways of the world, and thought—silly child—that if people were in love with one another, they had much better be married and live happily ever afterwards. She for her part was sure that Constance was very fond of Cecil. How could any one not be? It was very hard and unkind of Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury to come between them like that. Unfortunately, however, for Cecil, the ultimate decision did not rest with Marion, and they all felt that it would be better for him to shorten his holiday and return to Silchester.

He had come home with half unformed

intentions, which had quickly gathered strength and consistency, and now he was returning with the sad reality ever present to his mind that the bright future had slipped from his grasp. It was weary, weary work, but he was determined to face the prospect before him bravely, and in the strength of his God to labour more and more for Him in his allotted post !

CHAPTER XI.

“ Now all is done that love and care,
And skilful kindness could suggest;
And He who heard our anxious prayer
Will answer as His love deems best;
O, that both hopes and fears were still
Waiting on His mysterious will!

“ And yet both hopes and fears will crowd
Around that bright and precious child;
And both will speak their thoughts aloud
Till this distracted heart is wild,
O, might they all give place to one
Heart-filling prayer, “ God’s will be done.”

MONSELL.

MR. LEIGHTON’S feelings after the events recorded in the last chapter were much disturbed. He had not even told Cecil all that troubled him. The fact was that he felt that the relationship existing between Lady Nor-

bury and himself would for the future be even more complicated and difficult than ever. It would not be likely that she would look very warmly upon the father of the young man who in her opinion had presumed upon his intimacy at Oakwood, and ventured to think himself on an equality with her daughter. Hard as it had been for Mr. Leighton hitherto to steer clear of difficulties, he felt sure that his future task would be harder still. He positively dreaded the time when he should have to meet Lady Norbury's cold piercing eye. He felt ashamed of himself for it. What had he or any of his done which was unworthy of their fair and honoured name? Still so it was. He looked forward with a shrinking from which he could not rid himself to an interview with Lady Norbury.

Happily perhaps for him the meeting came—as such meetings often do—when he little expected it. There was just at that time a

considerable amount of fever in the parish. It had broken out somewhat suddenly in some cottages not belonging to Sir Lionel, but to a small proprietor in the neighbouring town. These cottages were always a parochial difficulty. Their owner cared but little as to the character of the people to whom he let them. He would do little or nothing in the way of repairs or improvements. The consequence was that they were always dirty and unwholesome, the windows broken and patched up with bits of old newspaper, or tin, or tracts. You never passed them without seeing a group of ill-clad, unkempt children playing in the neighbouring gutter. It was in these cottages that the fever had broken out. The parish doctor was indignant at the filth and squalor of the inhabitants, and said all he could in the way of warning. It was clear to him that filth and fever were cause and effect. Mr. Leighton had heartily backed him up,

but all to no purpose. The people who lived there did not hold to the new fangled notions. They had always lived in the same way, and no harm had yet come to them from it. It was all very well for those who had plenty of time on their hands, and had nothing else to do, to be always washing and cleaning; but they had other things to attend to. Of course it was useless to argue with such people, and now they were beginning to reap the penalty of their obstinate folly. Scarlet fever had broken out amongst them. There was one very decided case. Mr. Leighton was much distressed to hear that the mother of one of the largest of those ill-kept families had caught the fever, and was hardly expected to live. A very short time after he had heard it he was on his way to the cottages. Mrs. Leighton was always anxious when fever was in the parish, but happily for himself Mr. Leighton was not in the least degree nervous about it. To please his wife he always

fortified himself with a biscuit and a glass of wine before going into the infected atmosphere. Just as he was turning the corner which led up to the cottages where the fever was, he met Lady Norbury coming down from them. This was the first time they had met since Cecil's refusal. Perhaps it was well that there should be a common danger occupying their minds at that moment. It lessened the awkwardness of the encounter. Lady Norbury's manner was certainly rather haughty, but there was no freezing rigidity about it. How it would have been if they had met anywhere else Mr. Leighton hardly ventured to ask; but in the vicinity of sickness and death the wall of cold reserve crumbled down.

"You here, Lady Norbury," said Mr. Leighton. "Pardon me if I ask whether you think you ought to come to these cottages. I presume you have been up to see Mrs. Kingdon, who I understand is stricken down with fever, but is it wise

in you thus to expose yourself and others to infection ? ”

“ Fever, did you say, Mr. Leighton ; is Mrs. Kingdon’s illness fever ? ”

“ Indeed it is, Lady Norbury, were you not aware of the fact ? ”

“ No, I was not. I went in to see why the children were not at school, not even knowing that Mrs. Kingdon was ill. When I was there of course I went upstairs as it never occurred to me that it was anything out of the common way, otherwise I would not have done so ; you will find her deplorably ill. The fever, for from what you tell me I suppose it is fever, is positively raging. They have the greatest difficulty in keeping her in bed, and her ravings are fearful.”

“ I hope, Lady Norbury,” said Mr. Leighton, who was really much alarmed ; “ I hope you did not stop long with her ? ”

“ Not longer than was absolutely necessary ; I

was obliged to say a few words as to the necessity of cleanliness and fresh air. I never saw anything like the filth, and the closeness of the atmosphere was horrible."

"Well, Lady Norbury, I cannot help being sorry—very sorry—that you should have come down here. I am obliged to come. It is my positive duty, and I should be unworthy to fill the post which I occupy, if I were to shrink from it, but with you it is different, and I confess I am heartily sorry that you have been into Mrs. Kingdon's house."

"Well, Mr. Leighton, I really would not have gone if I had known she was ill of scarlet fever. I quite feel that it is a duty for some persons to stay away when there is infection, just as it is a duty for others to go to the infected house. However, I will promise you this, I will not go there again. Pray don't let me detain you any longer."

Lady Norbury with these words passed on and

left Mr. Leighton at the door of Mrs. Kingdon's cottage. We will leave the rector to make his pastoral visit and trust that his faithful words may not be without effect, for Mrs. Kingdon's hours on earth were numbered. Before the sun had set the church bell had tolled, announcing that she had passed away.

Lady Norbury returned at once to Oakwood. She was pale and anxious when she reached it. Mr. Leighton's words had troubled her more than she liked to confess. It was quite true that she was not in the least nervous about herself, but then she had unintentionally exposed others to danger. It was not at all likely that she should catch the fever, she had no fears on that score. It was not often that persons of her age were struck down. It was generally the young who were found to be most liable to it. The young ! And Constance was at home, rather poorly, too—perhaps predisposed to anything like illness. Oh, if she were to take it, Lady Norbury would

never forgive herself. She had been to the same cottages the day before, and had met Constance immediately upon her return, and walked with her the rest of the afternoon? Could there be any fear of her having infected her? The thought was too painful. It could not be so, it must not be so. Constance should go away at once for a little change of air. She had been looking pale and seemed out of spirits, and a breath of sea air would do her good.

With this determination Lady Norbury entered the house, and after having changed her dress went at once into her husband's study. Sir Lionel was busy at his writing table. He looked up as she came in.

“Well, Louisa, where have you been? Not down to the village again, I hope. Yes you have, I am sure—I see you have. Now you really ought not to do so. You were quite fagged and worn out yesterday, and now we have the same story over again. I think your duty to

your family ought really to prevent your acting in this way. I do believe you have been to that horrible Mrs. Kingdon."

"Well, Lionel dear, we won't talk about that just now. If you will accede to my request, I will promise you not to go near Mrs. Kingdon's again."

Sir Lionel looked up somewhat surprised at Lady Norbury's ready acquiescence, and she continued—

"The fact is that I want to ask you to take Constance and myself away to the sea-side for a little change. I think it would do us both good."

Sir Lionel at once pushed away his papers, rose from his seat, and taking Lady Norbury's hand, was struck by her pale and anxious face, and exclaimed—

"Why, Louisa, whatever is the matter? You have made yourself ill by going to those horrid cottages. I wish they were swept from the face

of the earth. They are a disgrace to Canondale. You look quite white and care-worn. I declare I will not let you go into the village any more."

"Nonsense, Lionel, I am not thinking about myself. Perhaps I may look a little pale, for I have had a hot walk, and the horrid smells at Mrs. Kingdon's make one sick. But that will soon pass off. Don't let us talk about it any more. But I do want you to talk about Constance. She has seemed to me quite unlike herself lately. She has no interest in anything, and goes moping about the house like a shadow. Lisette told me to-day that she was getting quite thin. Now if she were to catch the fever—"

"Fever," interrupted Sir Lionel, "what fever is there in the village?"

"Oh, I forgot that you had not heard of it. Mrs. Kingdon, I grieve to say, is very ill of scarlet fever!"

"Constance catch the fever. God forbid!" said Sir Lionel fervently. "You frighten me

Louisa. I am sure I will do anything you like. We will go to the sea-side at the end of the week."

"Do not let us wait till the end of the week. To-day is Tuesday. Why should we not go the day after to-morrow? We could make all the necessary arrangements to-morrow, and if we are to go, the sooner it is done the better."

"Very well then, let it be so. The day after to-morrow we go to the sea-side."

Lady Norbury turned away, and was on the point of leaving the room when Sir Lionel called her back.

"Louisa, you say that Constance has been looking pale, and out of spirits, and thin lately. How long have you observed this?"

"Well, Lionel, if you ask me, I must honestly say that I have observed it ever since that unfortunate affair about Cecil Leighton. Whether it has anything to do with her present looks I will not positively say, but it is a fact

that ever since that wretched day she has been very different to what she was before. And yet I can hardly think it is that, for you remember that when we put before her the folly of such a marriage, and how different it was to anything we had ever looked forward to for her, she seemed ready to acquiesce in all we said."

"Well, as to that, I hardly know. I remember that Constance showed herself a dutiful child, as she always has done, and that she said she never would oppose our strongly expressed wishes; but as to her ready acquiescence in the wisdom of our decision, I am not quite so sure."

"Why, Lionel, you never mean to say that you are changing your mind about it? You don't surely regret the decision we came to."

"Not at all. I am not changing my mind, nor do I regret our decision. If it were all to come over again I should act in exactly the same way. At the same time I feel that the decision was ours and not Constance's. We

told her what we wished, and she acquiesced in our wishes. But that, in my opinion, being the state of the case, she may possibly—mind I don't say she has—but she may possibly after all have lost her heart to Cecil Leighton, and that may be the cause of her present indisposition.”

“ I am sure I trust there is no chance of that. But at any rate, whatever be the cause, change of air and scene would be the best for her, and I daresay we shall see her look her old self again.”

And so it was arranged that the day but one after that on which this conversation took place Sir Lionel, Lady Norbury and Constance should go to the sea-side.

But, *l'homme propose mais Dieu dispose.*” The next morning Constance's place at the breakfast table was vacant, and on Lady Norbury going up to her room to see whether anything was the matter, she found Constance still in bed. She

said she had a bad headache, and felt altogether indisposed to get up.

"Would she take any breakfast?" asked her mother.

"No. She did not feel hungry. Perhaps if she were to sleep on a little she might feel better by and by."

Lady Norbury darkened the room, kissed her child's forehead, and returned to the breakfast room in considerable anxiety. She could not get rid of the fears which she had entertained the day before with reference to the fever. Mrs. Kingdon's death, so rapid and awful, had not tended to allay her fears.

"Lionel," she said, "we must send for Mr. Ellingham at once. I do not at all like Constance's appearance. She looks flushed and feverish, and has no appetite. God help us!"

Sir Lionel rang the bell, and despatched a messenger at once for Mr. Ellingham.

"Don't let the groom draw the rein till he has put the letter into Mr. Ellingham's hands."

Mr. Ellingham could not by any possibility be at Oakwood in less than an hour. Even if the messenger found him at home they could not expect him before that. Slowly, indeed, did the minutes pass. Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury could speak or think of nothing else.

"Here he comes," said Sir Lionel at last, as Mr. Ellingham drove rapidly up the road leading to Oakwood.

Sir Lionel went to the door to meet him.

"Thank you much, Mr. Ellingham, for coming so quickly. We are in considerable anxiety about Miss Norbury."

"Miss Norbury is it?" said Mr. Ellingham.
"Your groom hardly knew who was ill."

"Yes, my daughter. She has not seemed well lately, and this morning is unable to come down, so we thought the best plan was to send for you at once, and I earnestly hope you may be able to calm our fears."

"I trust so—I trust so—I had better go up at once."

Lady Norbury came out and accompanied Mr. Ellingham up to her daughter's room. They entered it softly, not knowing whether Constance was asleep, but a voice was heard emerging from the curtains.

"I am not asleep, Mamma, but I like the quiet."

Lady Norbury went to her bedside, and said—

"I thought it best to send for Mr. Ellingham, to see whether he cannot give you something to set you right, or perhaps we may not be able after all to go to the sea-side to-morrow. So here he is."

Mr. Ellingham came forward. He was always kind and considerate at a sick bed. He gently took Constance's hand and felt her pulse, bared her arm for one moment, and quietly placed it under the bed-clothes again. He placed his hand on her head and told her to keep herself

perfectly quiet, and that he would send her something to relieve her.

Mr. Ellingham and Lady Norbury left the room together. His face was anxious, and Lady Norbury exclaimed—

“Tell me, Mr. Ellingham, is it the fever?”

“Lady Norbury,” he replied, “I will not hide it from you. Your daughter has without doubt caught the fever. Her arm is now quite covered with the rash, and she will need the greatest care and most loving nursing.”

“God have mercy upon us all,” said Lady Norbury. “Mr. Ellingham need I say that if you want London advice, we would have it at once.”

“To be sure—to be sure you would. It is not necessary at present. The fever must run its course, and all you can do is to watch every turn. I will come back again this evening to see the effects of the medicine, which you must at once send for.”

Mr. Ellingham hurried off, and Lady Norbury broke as gently as she could to Sir Lionel the much dreaded fact that Constance had been struck down by scarlet fever.

CHAPTER XII.

“And is there care in heaven, and is there love
In heavenly spirits to these creatures bace,
That may compassion of their evils move?
There is—else much more wretched were the race
Of men than beasts—but O the exceeding grace
Of highest God, that loves His creatures so,
And all His workers with mercy doth embrace,
That blessed angels He sends to and fro
To serve to wicked men, to serve His wicked foe!

“How oft do they their silver bowers beam,
To come to succour us that succour want,
How oft do they with golden pineons weave
The flitting skyes, like flying pursuivant
Against foul feendes to aid us militant.
They for us fight, they watch and dewly ward
And their bright squadrons round about us plant,
And all for love, and nothing for reward;
O, why should heavenly God to man have such regard!”
SPENSER.

WHO is there that has not experienced the
painful quiet of a sick house! The blinds

drawn down—the voices hushed—the almost stealthy walk of the weary watchers; the unwonted sights that meet the eye at every turn speaking of suffering and attempts to alleviate it; the careworn anxious faces, not only of the family, but of those attendants who always minister in times of sickness so faithfully and lovingly—all tell the same tale; all speak of pain and anguish and forebodings of evil. We may be thankful that to these troubles that of anticipation is not added. There are those who at times wish to up-lift the veil which hides the future from our prying gaze, and would forecast all that God may see fit to bring upon them. But little do they know what the effect would be if their wishes were granted. The blessings vouchsafed in the present would be ever clouded and impaired by the evil foreseen and dreaded. The eye ever gazing into the future would paralyse all exertion for the passing moment. Much better is it for us all

that sorrow and trial should perhaps find us at times unprepared to meet them, than that each trying dispensation of our God should bow our heads with anticipation of the coming blow.

Certainly trouble had fallen upon the inhabitants at Oakwood most unexpectedly, and trouble, too, in their weakest point. Constance, their darling, their cherished idol, lay half unconscious on her sick bed. Earnest were the prayers which both Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury offered up in their hour of anguish to Almighty God, that He would see fit to bless the means used for her recovery, and restore once more to them the light of their eyes. If careful nursing could bring Constance through, there would be no doubt of her speedy recovery.

When Mr. Ellingham returned, as he had said he would do on the evening of the first day of her illness, he found as he fully expected that the fever had very much increased. Lady Norbury was naturally much alarmed, but

Mr. Ellingham tried to comfort her by assuring her that it was only natural it should be so. The fever must have its course. The great thing now was not to expose her to any chill. He would not answer for the consequences if the rash were in the least checked by exposure. Let her have plenty of fresh air, but still be kept warm. She had much in her favour—youth—a good constitution—a quiet mind—everything that kind nursing could suggest—and the whole case must be left with faith in the hands of a merciful and loving God.

“A quiet mind”—thought Lady Norbury—“Is that so? Has she a quiet mind, or are those white cheeks, and that languid manner, which has so distressed her father and myself, the sign of a troubled heart? Can it be that she regrets the decision of that well-remembered day? Had Cecil come and stolen away her heart from them all? No, surely, it cannot be so.”

But Lady Norbury could not decide the

question. However strongly she repeated to herself the words, "No it cannot be so," there was always an echoing whisper, "May it not be so? Think again." And Lady Norbury did think again, till her brow ached, but was never any nearer the solution of her difficulty at the end than at the beginning of her musings.

It was not, however, long before it was decided for her. Constance grew rapidly worse. Nothing seemed to check the force of the fever. Mr. Ellingham watched every turn, but his skill seemed to avail but little. Night after night did Lady Norbury sit up watching by the bedside of her darling child, till her strength was almost exhausted. Remonstrance was in vain. She would allow no one to take her place. Was medicine to be given, was Constance's aching brow to be bathed, Lady Norbury was always at hand to do either the one or the other. A few short minutes' sleep snatched at intervals by day seemed enough to restore her powers. It was

on the third night that she was watching as usual by Constance's bedside. Mr. Leighton had been up to her in the evening and had earnestly offered up prayer by her side. Most kind and tender had his manner been, and both Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury had been much comforted by the visit of the man of God. It was clear that his heart, too, was bowed down with sorrow; that his expressions of deep anxiety were real and true; and this at once touched a sympathetic chord in the parents' hearts.

Lady Norbury was at Constance's bedside. She was very restless, and throwing her arms about, and gazing round the room with her eyeballs almost starting out of her head. Nothing seemed to quiet her. Suddenly she started up. Lady Norbury instantly passed her arms around her, endeavouring to persuade her to lie down again.

"What is it, my darling? There is nothing here to harm you."

"Cecil, Cecil," cried Constance, "What can

you think of me? It was not I. It was not, indeed. I did not write that letter. Do come back to me. Why are you so long away? You are very cruel. My heart will break."

She looked round wildly upon her mother, but hardly seemed to recognise her. Her eyes were fixed and lustreless.

"Where are you?" she cried. "Do not stop away. I cannot come. They will not let me. What must you think of me?"

Lady Norbury tried in vain to calm her. The delirium ran very high, and it was with difficulty that her mother could keep her in bed. She did not venture to call any one lest Constance's words should be heard and her secret discovered.

After a time, however, the paroxysm wore itself out and Constance became calm again. As soon as ever Lady Norbury could summon the servant, a messenger was at once sent for Mr. Ellingham.

When Mr. Ellingham arrived and was told of

her delirium, he confessed himself much alarmed. He would certainly like further advice. The remedies he had made use of seemed to make no impression. What had she said in her delirium? If there was anything particular on her mind it might, perhaps, come out in her ravings, and certainly, if there *was* anything on her mind it would quite account for the unfavourable symptoms which had set in, and would materially hinder her recovery.

Lady Norbury did not hesitate for a moment. Sorely did her pride rebel against confessing to Mr. Ellingham that Constance had spoken in her delirium words which had left no doubt upon her mind that her daughter's heart had been given to Cecil Leighton. But the mother's love conquered the mother's pride. The doctor must know it all or he could not prescribe the proper remedies. Mr. Ellingham did not seem at all surprised at Lady Norbury's disclosures, and said he was thankful to find that there was some

cause for her present state of excitement, and that now he should know better what was the proper course to adopt ; of course the secret was safe with him. He would not breathe a syllable about it to a soul. Doctors were often depositaries of secrets of which the outer world were ignorant.

When Lady Norbury was left alone with her daughter once more, quiet and composed, she was able to realize what had passed. Then it really was so. Sir Lionel was right. Constance had only acquiesced in their decision about Cecil as a dutiful daughter. And it was this which had blanched her cheek and impaired her energies, this which had probably predisposed her to catch the fever, this which had brought her down to death's door. Would it do more than that ? She hardly in thought dared to ask the question. It was too harrowing. But if it should be so, how far would she be answerable for it ? God forgive her—would her darling daughter's death be laid

to her charge? She knew she had urged Sir Lionel with all her powers to decide at once and definitively against Cecil's proposals, and that, when Sir Lionel seemed disposed to consult Constance's feelings on the subject, she had vehemently opposed him. And yet it was all from love to her child. And was this the consequence, Constance ill—struck down—delirious—perhaps dying! Lady Norbury covered her face with her hands and wept bitter tears, exceeding bitter tears.

Mr. Leighton was indefatigable in his visits at Oakwood. And a great comfort they were. Even if he was not able always to see Constance herself and minister pastorally to her, yet his words of wisdom and faith were most comforting and supporting both to Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury. Lady Norbury could not withstand his heartfelt sympathy, and there now was no reserve or coldness between them. Perhaps something of this was owing to Mrs. Egerton's influence. She had come to Oakwood immediately on hearing of her

God-daughter's illness. Of course it was imprudent—she knew that—but she loved her darling Constance, and nothing would keep her from her side. She saw her opportunity and unobtrusively and wisely helped to heal the breach between her sister and Mr. Leighton. Lady Norbury had told her what had passed during the height of Constance's delirium, and though Mrs. Egerton said but little she had no doubt in her own mind as to what was the proper course to pursue. The time had not yet come for action, but she hoped it soon would.

For Constance certainly seemed to have passed the turning point. Nothing could exceed her weakness. She could hardly move herself in bed, but there was now no delirium, and she had enjoyed a little quiet sleep. Lady Norbury scarcely ventured to whisper to herself that Constance was better, but at last she asked Mr. Ellingham if he did not think the worst crisis was over.

“Lady Norbury,” he replied, “I trust so.

There is no doubt that your dear daughter is better than she was the day before yesterday. All her symptoms have improved. I trust in God, that if no unfavourable turn should take place, she may yet be your joy and comfort."

"Thank God, and thank you Mr. Ellingham for words so consoling to a deeply stricken heart."

Mr. Ellingham did not quite enter into the force of Lady Norbury's words, but he saw that she was deeply agitated, and he added—

"You really must be careful of yourself, Lady Norbury. These days and nights of watching have been too much for you. You will be quite worn out. Now that your daughter is quiet, why should not Sir Lionel and Mrs. Egerton take their share in the nursing. You must consider yourself a little, or we shall have two patients in the house instead of one."

"You are very kind, Mr. Ellingham. I dare say I do look pale. It would be strange if I did not. Constance's recovery would be my best restorative."

"Of course I know that is so, Lady Norbury, I won't urge you against your will, only pray be careful."

But Lady Norbury never seemed to be happy when away from Constance. She was restless and uneasy except when in her accustomed seat by Constance's bedside. How quiet and still those days were! How peacefully they passed! How contented she was to sit in the half-darkened room with her daughter's hand clasped in her's, watching every passing shade on her face, and ever and anon speaking some gentle soothing word. Was this Lady Norbury whom the world called haughty, cold, severe? Sickness and sorrow had been God's messengers to her for good, and had wrought in her their appointed work.

But as she sat there day by day, it was impossible to hide from herself the fact that Constance's strength did not return as they had hoped it would have done. She had sunk into an apathetic state and nothing appeared to rouse or

interest her. Perhaps what she seemed to look forward to most were Mr. Leighton's daily visits. A few verses of a chapter in the Bible and a few words of prayer were sufficient to try her strength, but her hand held out to him in grateful recognition of his ministrations proved that she really valued them. At times, too, her mother fancied that a fixed melancholy was settling upon her face. She would lie for hours with an anxious expression, and then suddenly awake from her reverie with an unconscious start, and look round nervously to see whether her mother had noticed her movements. It was after one of these painful hours that her mother took her hand, and said—

“What is it, Constance? There is something that distresses you. You look anxious and troubled. Do tell me, my darling, what it is. There is nothing your father and I would not do for you.”

“It is nothing, thank you, dear Mamma,” said Constance. “I have everything I could wish for.

No one could be more tender or loving than dear papa, and you, and Aunt Lucy. And Mr. Leighton, too—how kind and dear he has been. Don't you like him better than you did, dear Mamma?"

"Mr. Leighton, Constance, has proved himself a true and kind friend, and I am most grateful to him. I daresay—nay, I believe—that I have much wronged him in times past. But still I am sure there is something on your mind which you have not told me. You need hide nothing from me, Constance"—and Lady Norbury put her head on the pillow and whispered in her daughter's ear—"Constance, is it about Cecil that you trouble yourself?"

Poor Constance was silent for a moment. She looked her mother full in the face with an air of unfeigned surprise.

"Did I say anything about him, dear Mamma, when I was ill? What could make you think of him?"

“Never mind what made me think of him. A mother’s eye, dear Constance, is keen and quick-sighted, and she cannot see her daughter pine and languish without longing to know the cause. Tell me, do you worry yourself about Cecil?”

Constance’s only answer was a flood of tears. No eloquence could have been more effectual. Her mother gently said—

“Well, Constance, my darling, let your troubled heart rest. Your father and I will let you do just as you like. Only make haste now to get well, and then we will see whether Cecil may not be more to us than he has ever yet been, very dear to you, and very dear to us as a son.”

Constance’s tears did not cease—on the contrary, they flowed freely, but they were not, as had been Lady Norbury’s, exceeding bitter tears, but tears of relief—tears of pent-up sorrow now unlocked—aye, tears of joy, and tears of returning health!

CHAPTER XIII.

“ It is the soul that sees ; the outward eyes
Present the object, but the mind desires ;
And thence delight, disgust, or cool indiff'rence rise.
When minds are joyful, then we look around
And what is seen is all on fairy ground ;
Again they sicken, and on every view
Cast their own dull and melancholy hue ;
Or, if absorb'd by their peculiar cares,
The vacant eye or viewless matter glares,
Our feelings still upon our views attend
And their own natures to the objects lend ;
Sorrow and joy are in their influence sure,
Long as the passion reigns the effects endure ;
But love in minds his various changes makes
And clothes his objects with the change he takes,
His light and shade on every view he throws
And on each object, what he feels, bestows.”

CRABBE.

It may be well imagined that Cecil's return to
Silchester was not very cheerful. There is
always something rather dispiriting in returning

from a happy family circle to a solitary lodging, and when to this you add the fact that Cecil's hopes which, unconsciously to himself had been gathering strength during the past few months, had been suddenly dissipated, it was impossible but that he should be down-hearted. He felt, however, that he had done the right thing in leaving Canondale at once. It would never have done for him to expose either himself or Constance to meetings which it would have been quite impossible wholly to have avoided. Indeed he did not see how he could have acted otherwise than he had done throughout. It would have been wrong in him to have tried to carry matters further without first coming to a distinct understanding with Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury. Perhaps, had he approached Constance first, his chance might have been better. But still he felt strongly that at her age he would have had no moral right to have spoken to her on such a subject without the knowledge of her parents. No, it

was better as it was. He had the full sanction and approbation of his father and mother in all that he had done, and his conscience told him that he had acted throughout in an upright and honourable manner.

But notwithstanding this, he could hardly help shuddering when, on ringing the bell at his lodgings, he once more saw the red cheeks of the serving maid emerge from the lower regions of the house. Before, he had thought her rather a cheerful looking girl than otherwise; now in his eyes she was anything but pleasing. Upstairs, too, it was just the same. Of course his return was wholly unexpected, and his room certainly looked cheerless and uncomfortable. It almost seemed as if no one had entered it since he left Silchester at the beginning of the week. But an un-opened envelope upon the table, which evidently bore on its face that it contained a bill, showed that at any rate that could not have been the case. But the windows were shut, and the

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blinds drawn down, and the unmistakable odour of an unoccupied room greeted him as he opened the door.

“ Well, this is not very [cheerful]”—thought Cecil—“ how different would it have been if all had gone well with me ! And what shall I say to Mr. Chisholm ? I cannot tell him all that has passed, and yet how can I explain my sudden return, when I was so anxious to get away for my holiday at once. I must put the best face I can upon the whole business. Mr. Chisholm is a gentleman, and I don’t think he will pry into matters if I simply tell him that circumstances have occurred unexpectedly, which obliged me to return before my holiday was over.”

Cecil was quite right in his thoughts. It was not very long after his return to Silchester that he went up to the rectory. The interview with Mr. Chisholm was much dreaded by him, and therefore he was determined to get it over at once. But Mr. Chisholm was most kind and un-

inquisitive. Cecil simply said, in reply to Mr. Chisholm's surprised look when the servant announced his name—

“Circumstances into which it is not necessary for me to enter have occurred, which made it advisable for me to return rather sooner than I intended. I should much have enjoyed the holiday you were kind enough to arrange for me, but on the whole my father thought it was better that I should be at my post again just at the present time.”

Mr. Chisholm at once saw that Cecil was ill at ease. He had a shrewd suspicion of what had happened, although he did not disclose it by a word or a look, and replied kindly—

“Well, Leighton, of course I did not expect to see you, as I thought you were still at Canondale. I am sorry that anything should have happened which should have curtailed your holiday, but I daresay that later on in the year you will be glad

to go away again, and then, when the time comes, you will be glad you postponed the pleasure. After all, perhaps, it is as well that you should have come back, for this very morning's post brought a letter from my old college friend, saying that he was unable to come here at the present moment—some business in London required his instant attention—and that therefore his visit here must be for the present indefinitely postponed."

This was a great relief to Cecil. Anything like duty or work was most grateful to him, and took his thoughts for the time being away from himself and his own interests.

He had not been idle before, but now a working fit seemed to be upon him. Morning, noon and night found him engaged in his parochial duties. He never seemed at ease except when actively employed. Mr. Chisholm saw through it all. He saw that Cecil was trying to run away from his own thoughts, and was confirmed in his

suspicious as to the nature of the circumstances which had caused his return.

The trouble, however, which he had already experienced was almost slight in comparison with that which now fell upon him. When Cecil heard of the scarlet fever having broken out in his father's parish he was much alarmed. But it was for Marion that he felt anxious. He knew very well that his father would be constant in his visits at the houses of the sick, and that, however careful he might be, it was quite impossible wholly to keep Marion free from the possibility of infection.

It never occurred to him that there was likely to be any communication between the inmates of Oakwood Park and those who were struck down by the fever, and therefore he was not alarmed on their account. Anxiously, indeed, did he look for each morning's post to tell him how matters were going on. And then, when a letter from his mother came saying that his father

had gone up to Oakwood, having heard that Constance was rather poorly, but that she hoped it was nothing much, and that she would add a postscript after his return, how eagerly did he turn to the end of the letter to see what was the real state of the case. The postscript ran thus—

“ P.S.—Your father has just returned from Oakwood. He did not see Constance, but he was there at the same time as Mr. Ellingham. I grieve to tell you, dear Cecil, that there is no doubt she is sickening for the scarlet fever. It appears that Lady Norbury went to Mrs. Kingdon's, not knowing that she was ill with scarlet fever, and this may have been the means of giving Constance this illness; of this we cannot be certain. But Constance is in bed, very weak and ill. I know that you will join your prayers with ours, that God of His great mercy may restore her to health. I grieve to think of you, all

alone with this fresh trouble, but I knew you would not like to be kept in ignorance of it. God help us all, for we need His help!

“Your very loving mother,

“S. LEIGHTON.”

Constance ill! perhaps dying! The thought was agony to Cecil. True, it was never likely she would be to him anything more than a friend, yet that there should be any likelihood of her being suddenly cut down like this seemed too dreadful to be a reality. It was but the other day that she had looked so blooming, and been so merry, and now she was lying perhaps unconscious, perhaps at that moment passing away! “God help us, indeed,” said Cecil to himself, “for none other can do so.” His first thought was that he could not stop away from Canondale, that it would be happier far for him to be at the rectory at such a time. But on second thoughts it was clear that it was not fitting that he should

act thus. What right had he to show any more than an ordinary interest in Constance? He would not for his own selfish gratification cause even a whisper to be muttered as to any possible relationship between her and himself. No. He must suffer in silence and alone, but how agonizing were the many hours of suspense none but he ever really knew.

Day after day followed, one upon the other. The various changes in Constance's state were duly posted to Cecil. His mother told him that his father's visits, sad though they were, were a great comfort to him. Constance, she said, always seemed glad to see him, and welcomed him with a kind smile. Lady Norbury, too, was most gracious. Nothing could exceed her devoted nursing. She was never absent from her child's bed-side, and Mrs. Leighton added, that her manner towards Cecil's father was much kinder than it had been. She seemed in her hour of sorrow to appreciate somewhat more than she had

done his real worth. Still, at the best, this was but cold comfort to poor Cecil. He longed—oh, how earnestly—to hear that the fever had turned and that there were well grounded hopes of Constance's recovery. He pleaded at the Throne of Grace God's promises of a gracious answer to fervent prayer, and prayed as perhaps he had never prayed before.

It was on a Sunday morning that the news came to him that a slight change for the better had undoubtedly taken place. Constance was no longer delirious, but had enjoyed some calm quiet sleep which had much refreshed her. Mr. Ellingham had told Mr. Leighton that she was certainly better, and that there was no reason now to despair about her recovery. More than that he hardly ventured to say at present.

Cecil fell upon his knees, and from his heart thanked God. He had been earnest in his prayers, and now he was not backward in his thanksgivings. Of a naturally hopeful disposi-

tion himself, he looked upon the bright side, and in his mind's eye already saw Constance still weak, but convalescent. But after all, what was that to him? In proportion as hopes of her recovery revived, his own feeling of despondency and regret at his ill-success regained the mastery over him. Anxiety for Constance had taken him out of himself for a time, and now that the accounts of her were better, the old feeling of solitariness came back again with greater force than ever.

His congregation found out from his sermons that something was wrong with him. His discourses took a gloomy view of life generally, and reflected faithfully the workings of his own heart. But of this he was quite unconscious himself. What he wrote was natural to him, and he was quite unaware of any change in the character and general tendency of his sermons.

The accounts of Constance, which he still received daily from Canondale, continued to show

improvement in her state. His mother told him that from the time at which the fever had taken a turn, her convalescence, though slow, had been very steady. He was told one day that on his father's going to see her as usual the day before, he had found her sitting up in her bedroom at the window, propped up with pillows. A few days after came the news that she had been able to be moved into another room, and each day's post brought tidings of returning health and strength. There was a sentence in one of his mother's letters which puzzled Cecil much.

"Perhaps," she said, "this illness which has so grieved us, may after all have proved a great blessing. It may bring about a happier state of things here."

What did his mother mean? It was not surely a general aphorism as to the possible blessing of the sickness. Of course it was intended to be a blessing in disguise. Cecil knew that before, and his mother was not wont to write platitudes.

Could it refer to him, and could it mean that Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury were disposed to look upon his suit more indulgently than they had done before? Hardly that. How could the mere fact of Constance having happened to sicken with scarlet fever have any influence upon their feelings towards him? It was foolish that such a thought should ever enter his head. No. He saw it now. His mother had before said that Lady Norbury was much kinder than she had been to his father, and that must be what was meant. Constance's illness would doubtless engender a better feeling between Oakwood Park and the rectory so far as his father was concerned. He was almost disposed to be vexed with his mother for having put it in such a way as that by any possibility it might be misunderstood. And yet was he not rather hard upon her? Her thoughts, he remembered, were not centring as his were round one fact, and continually recurring to it. How stupid of him

ever to think of anything else, of course it was quite clear now. Lady Norbury's extreme jealousy of his father was passing away. His attention during Constance's illness had won her heart, and so "this illness would bring about a happier state of things at Canondale."

But then, the next day came another sentence which aroused strange thoughts within him. Again it was his mother who wrote.

She said that his father had just come back from Oakwood, and told her that Lady Norbury had spoken most kindly of Cecil; had asked after him; inquired when he had gone back to Silchester; whether he had been told of Constance's illness, and of her present state of convalescence, and—more than that—had added—

"I hope when he comes to the rectory we shall be able to see him here, for we should be very sorry not to be good friends with him."

He read the sentence over and over again,

brought out once more the letter of the previous day, put the two passages together, compared them, put them in various lights, and at last was almost driven to the conclusion that his mother really did mean more than she had said, and that, after all, the happier state of things at Canondale referred not so much to Lady Norbury and his father as to Constance and himself! When once this thought had really taken possession of him, he could not remain quiet without ascertaining whether it really rested upon any foundation, or whether it was merely another castle in the air destined to crumble away. He started off, therefore, immediately for Canondale, determined to set the matter at rest at once.

He arrived at Canondale at mid-day and soon found himself at the rectory. His father did not seem altogether surprised to see him, but greeted him with the words—

“ We half expected you, Cecil. I thought perhaps your mother’s letter would bring you

over here, and, to tell you the truth, I am very glad to see you, for I want a little conversation with you."

Cecil at once accompanied his father into his study, and there learned from him that he had been right in understanding his mother's letter as referring to himself. Mr. Leighton told him that undoubtedly a great change had come over the inmates of Oakwood. Sir Lionel had always been kind to him, but that now, since Constance's illness, Lady Norbury seemed to vie with him in attentions to himself. There was no longer any coldness on either side. On the contrary, there were no pastoral visits to which he looked forward with greater pleasure. Lady Norbury was always ready with a gracious smile, and all was happy and bright between them. But this was not all. She had latterly constantly mentioned Cecil's name, and always in a markedly kind manner, and the day before, as he was leaving the house, Sir Lionel had

said to him, "Be sure you let us know if Cecil comes to the rectory. I am almost sorry I told him not to call here, for he may have thought it unkind, but indeed I did not mean it so."

"This being the case," said Mr. Leighton, "I could hardly rest happy without seeing you, and yet I scarcely liked to ask you to come over here, lest your expectations and hopes might be raised too high, and you should again be disappointed."

"Thank you, indeed, my dear Father, for what you have said. I am so glad I came. A drowning man will catch at any straw, and I am only too thankful to see any glimmer of light in my horizon. Perhaps the best plan will be for me to go up to Oakwood and see whether anything can be done."

Mr. Leighton smiled, and said—

"No, Cecil, I think not that. In the first place they do not admit any one into the house. It is quite true that Constance is daily regaining

strength, and there is now no special cause for anxiety, but in cases of scarlet fever, the time of recovery is considered very infectious, and therefore they are still most careful. When Sir Lionel spoke about your coming up to Oakwood, I do not for a moment think he contemplated you would so speedily appear at the rectory."

"Then," said Cecil, "shall I write? The letter I received before from Sir Lionel was not of such a nature as to induce further correspondence."

"That is quite true," replied his father, "but then you must remember the ground was not broken before. You tried to break into the fortress without opening any parallels first, and perhaps that was the reason why you were repulsed with loss."

"Perhaps so. At any rate I will follow your advice, as then, if I fail, I shall not blame myself for acting in any head-strong way."

If Cecil had found it difficult to open out his

heart before to Sir Lionel, he found it doubly difficult to do so now for the second time. What could he say? What had really occurred in the interval to justify him in presuming to lay his hopes again before Sir Lionel? But yet his father did not discourage him from doing so; nay, rather encouraged him. And he had lately been a constant visitor at Oakwood. Did he know more about it than he acknowledged? Cecil could hardly make up his mind, but at any rate the letter should be written. It ran thus—

“ Canondale Rectory,

“ Sept. 20th, 18—

“ MY DEAR SIR LIONEL,

“ I hope you will not be very much surprised at seeing my handwriting, but I have come home for a few days, and as my father tells me that it would not be right for me to call at Oakwood just yet, I venture to write to you to say how very grieved I have been to hear of

Constance's severe illness, and how thankfully I have learned that she is now convalescent. My father gave me your kind message the other day, as well as Lady Norbury's. Very many thanks for them."

Here Cecil paused for a long time. Should he say anything more, or should it merely be a general letter of kindly enquiry to break ground? On the whole he thought it better to say at once what was in his mind. Accordingly he continued—

"You can hardly tell what days of anxiety I have passed lately at Silchester. I know that I had no right to think of Constance, but I could not help doing so. Day and night she has never been absent from my thoughts. If I was wrong, forgive me. Her illness has shown me more than ever how entirely my heart's best affections have been given to her, and I venture once more to ask you whether it is utterly impossible that

I could ever be allowed to address her as something more than an ordinary friend? I explained fully to you the other day the state of my own feelings towards her, and it is not necessary for me now to repeat them. Suffice it to say that a line from you bidding me not to despair would indeed rejoice my inmost heart.

“ Believe me always,

“ My dear Sir Lionel,

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ CECIL LEIGHTON.

“ Sir Lionel Norbury, Bart.”

The bearer of the foregoing letter was told to wait for an answer. It was not long, therefore, before Cecil received the following reply—

“ Oakwood Park,

“ Sept. 20th, 18—

“ MY DEAR CECIL,

“ Thank you much for your kind letter. We have indeed great cause to be thankful that we see our dear daughter as well as she

is. Your good father will tell you how long she hovered between life and death, and how terribly anxious we were. Now, thank God, she daily gains strength. Lady Norbury was with me when your note came, and we have together talked over its contents. I cannot say very much on the subject at present. Constance has hardly yet recovered sufficiently from her illness for us to think of such things. But this I will say, if she continues to get well, we shall be very glad to see you up here once more, and if you can win Constance's assent, no objection shall be raised on our part. You cannot expect me to pledge myself to more than this.

“With our united kind regards,

“Believe me,

“Yours very truly,

“LIONEL NORBURY.

“Rev. Cecil Leighton.”

“Pledge himself to more than that!” Indeed Cecil could not. His daughter was not a slave

to be handed over at her parents' will. He wished for nothing more than a free stage and no *dis-favour*, and that Sir Lionel had promised him. A load was taken from his heart. It was not long after the receipt of this note, that he was once more on his way to Silchester, and his father's cheerful words fell happily on his ears.

“ Good-bye Cecil. So far you have prospered to your heart's content. I daresay we shall soon welcome you here again, and perhaps after all Constance's illness may bring about a happier state of things at Canondale.”

CHAPTER XIV.

"See the man that long has tost
On the thorny bed of pain,
At length repair his vigour lost,
And breathe and walk again.
The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise."

GRAY.

"O ! jours de la convalescence !
Jours d'une pure volupté :
C'est une nouvelle naissance,
Un rayon d'immortalité.
Quel feu ! tous les plaisirs ont volé dans mon âme !
J'adore avec transport le céleste flambeau ;
Tout m'intéresse, tout m'enflamme,
Pour moi l'univers est nouveau.

* * * * *

"Les plus simples objets ; le chante d'un Fauvette,
Le matin d'un beau jour, la verdure des bois,
La fraîcheur d'une violette ;

Milles spectacles, q'autrefois
On voyoit avec nonchalance,
Transportent aujourd'hui, presentent des appas
Inconnus à l'indifference,
Et que la foule ne voit pas."

GRESSET,

(Quoted in the Aldine edition of Gray's Poems).

HAPPILY there was no drawback to Constance's recovery. As soon as the load of secret sorrow was removed from her mind by her mother's loving assurance that no opposition on their part need be dreaded with reference to Cecil, she rapidly regained strength. Those days of convalescence passed quietly and peacefully. The stream of life with Constance flowed on smoothly and evenly, and there was nothing to interrupt or even ruffle the surface. Happy days they were for her. Her duty and business was just to get well as quickly as she could, and she applied herself most diligently to this business. There was not one in the household who was not at her beck and call. For a time she reigned as Queen Supreme and held gentle sway over most willing

subjects. For hours she would sit at the window of her room which overlooked the undulations of the park, enjoying the sight of Nature's repose as none can enjoy them save those who have just risen from a sick bed. Fresh beauties daily disclosed themselves to her, which much to her surprise had hitherto escaped her notice. Nothing more had passed between her mother and herself with reference to Cecil.

It was on the day after the letter referred to in the previous chapter had been received from Cecil, that Constance and Lady Norbury were as usual sitting together in her room. Constance was at the window; her mother was at the table writing to her sister, Mrs. Egerton, who had gone home when her God-daughter's recovery seemed, humanly speaking, beyond doubt.

Lady Norbury looked up to Constance, and as though the subject was suggested to her by something she was writing, said—

“Cecil was at the rectory yesterday, Constance.

He came over for the day from Silchester. It appears that he was in a dreadful state of anxiety while you were so very ill, and longed to know something more about you than letters could tell him, and so came over to see his father and hear from him some details of your illness."

Constance looked round with a rather surprised air, but simply said—

"Cecil here yesterday, was he, Mamma? I suppose neither you nor Papa saw him, did you?"

"No, my child, we did not. It would not have been safe for him to have come up here. After such an illness as you have had you must expect every one to avoid your presence for some time. You will find when you begin to get about again that you will be looked upon as a regular Pariah."

"Well, I don't know about that, Mamma. I daresay Cecil would be no more afraid of scarlet fever than his father has been."

"But, Constance, although we did not see him,

your father had a letter from him. I thought perhaps you might like to see it, so here it is."

Lady Norbury rose and placed Cecil's letter in her daughter's hand. Constance looked deadly pale as her mother gave it her, and Lady Norbury almost regretted that she had introduced the subject so soon. She would not have done so, had not Mr. Ellingham told her that it would be much better as far as Constance's health was concerned for the whole matter to be settled as soon as possible.

Constance read the letter slowly and carefully, and when she had finished it, turned to the beginning again and read it once more. She then returned it to her mother, saying—

"Thank you, dear Mamma, for showing me this. It seems to me a very nice and proper letter. I daresay he found it very difficult to know what to say. Do tell me what Papa wrote in answer to him."

"Your father wrote to him most kindly; spoke

of you as now daily gaining strength, but that it was early days as yet for such matters as Cecil wrote about to be mentioned to you. Your father added that he should be very glad to see him here when you were well again, and that if he could succeed in gaining you over to his side, no opposition to his wishes would be raised on our part."

"Did papa really write that? How very very kind! Oh, Mamma, I am so glad and happy. I do not want anything more. I daresay Cecil is quite contented now, and I am sure I am, and I almost wish we could remain as we are."

"Well, Constance, I don't quite know what Cecil would say to that. If you and he can arrange it so between you, you may depend upon it that your father and I will make no objection!"

Nothing more passed upon the subject between Constance and her mother. It was tacitly postponed until she should be strong and well again.

It was now that her parents discovered how utterly her strength had left her in her illness. The least exertion seemed to overtax her powers. So long as she was quiet and inactive all seemed well with her, but the mere walking from one room to another almost appeared to be too much for her. This would be so, Mr. Ellingham said, until they could get away to the sea-side for a little change of air.

“The sea-side !” “Change of air !” How those words recalled to Lady Norbury the conversation with her husband immediately after her return from Mrs. Kingdon’s, when a visit to the sea-side had been determined upon at once. There was to have been no delay. One day’s interval was to have been sufficient. And now many weeks had passed away ! And how much had happened during that time ! Constance had been at death’s door. Mr. Ellingham had since told Lady Norbury that at one time he had really despaired of her rallying. Their one only daughter

had been all but snatched away from their loving arms! Now she could realise it, and as she looked at her pale sweet gentle face, knew how it would have snapped her very heart-strings if she had been called upon to lose her. God be thanked, that agonising fear had passed away. But then the future—of course it could not be very long before something would have to be settled between her and Cecil. That, too, had all arisen out of her illness. If it had not been for that, Lady Norbury might never have known her darling's secret. Was she glad she knew it now? Was she glad that matters should end as they now were likely to do? She hardly knew. Her thoughts varied so about it. When she looked at Constance's calm happy expression of countenance she felt thankful for her peace of mind; but when she was alone in her own room and thought of the sad parting with Constance and the bitter blank in their house which could never be filled up, she almost felt disposed to be

angry with Cecil for having come between the daughter and her parents, and well nigh longed that Constance in her delirium had never breathed his name! Not for one moment, however, did she let her daughter know what was working in her mind. She knew such thoughts should not be indulged in, and with a stern determination she repressed them.

As soon as ever Mr. Ellingham gave the permission they were off for the sea-side. And a pretty sight it was to see Constance walking slowly on the sands leaning upon her father's arm with the sea breezes gradually bringing back the roses into her cheeks. Those quiet walks, with the gentle ripple of the lazy wave which seemed to do homage by bowing down to them as they passed along—how pleasant and enjoyable they were! And then the drive into the country! The green was so refreshing after gazing on the sea, and the woods were just beginning to turn, which gave a variety to the foliage. Constance thought

she had never passed her time more happily. But the month flew quickly—only too quickly—by. It seemed as if they had only just settled down into the quiet routine of daily life, when the time came for their return to Oakwood. The change had been a thorough success. Constance was now considered off the sick list, and as they entered their own house again, Sir Lionel said—

“Now, Constance, you must abdicate in your mother’s favour. We have been chained to your car for some time now. Henceforth the lawful sovereign must occupy her throne. Royalty, however, seems to have agreed with you, for I never saw you look better.”

“Well, dear Papa, I am only too glad to retire again into private life. Never was any sovereign served by such loving subjects as I have been, and indeed,” said Constance, gravely, “I am most deeply grateful to you and dear mamma for all your loving tenderness and care.”

Many days had not passed away after the return of Constance to Oakwood before Cecil once more found his way over to Canondale. His mother had duly chronicled for his information all the events connected with the Norbury family which she thought would be of interest to him, and it was a source of unfeigned happiness to him to hear of Constance's continued recovery. After Sir Lionel's last letter to him his course seemed plain. Carefully had he kept those words—so precious to him—in which Sir Lionel had assured him that if he could win Constance's assent no objection should be raised on Lady Norbury's part or his own. He had thought much over his interview with Constance, had remembered how in his school holidays and Oxford vacations she had always been his constant playmate and companion, and how as years passed on a closer and graver intercourse had gradually arisen between them. Never by word or look—as far as he was aware—had he given her a hint as to what his own feelings had

been. And yet he could not help hoping, nay, believing, that he should be able to gain her over to his side. And then on the faith of Sir Lionel's pledged word, no opposition should be raised to the fulfilment of his highest hopes. His mother thought that there should be no unnecessary delay in the matter, and that it was better for all parties concerned that it should be settled speedily one way or the other.

Accordingly the very day after Cecil's arrival at Canondale he walked up to Oakwood. Do what he would, he could not help his heart beating rapidly as he went through the park. He felt that his future happiness depended upon one little word now to be said by Constance. The die was to be cast. Would the numbers thrown gain the prize? God grant they might!

As Cecil approached the house he saw that Constance was walking in the garden with her father and mother. Sir Lionel, too, caught sight of Cecil, and went through the house to bring him

out to them. Both Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury greeted him very kindly.

“ We had heard of your arrival at the rectory, and thought, perhaps, it would not be long before you found your way up here.”

Cecil turned to Constance and held out his hand to her. He could not help being much struck by her altered appearance. He had not seen her, it must be remembered, at all since her illness. To those who had been with her daily she now seemed strong and well, but to Cecil it was otherwise. He thought she looked most fragile, and as though a rude breeze would blow her away.

“ Thank God, Constance,” were his first words, “ that He has raised you up again. You don’t know how earnestly I joined my prayers to those of others that your life might be spared, or how gratefully I now thank Him that He has heard and answered our prayers !”

“ Indeed I have been very ill,” answered Constance. “ But I have been surrounded by kind

friends, and while I thank God for His goodness. I am also most grateful to them for all their kind thoughts of me."

Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury, by an almost imperceptible movement on their part, passed on a short distance in front of Cecil and Constance, and left them walking together. The gravel path on which they were, at the end of the garden, wound round a clump of oaks from which indeed the park had originally taken its name, and so brought you again to the house. It was not until they reached the door that Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury lingered so as to allow Cecil and Constance to overtake them. Lady Norbury looked round, and it was wholly unnecessary to ask any questions. Cecil's face was radiant with happiness, and he held out his hand to Sir Lionel saying—

"Indeed I thank both you and Lady Norbury for the great confidence you have placed in me. Please God you shall never regret it."

Constance and her parents passed into the house, while Cecil hurried back to the rectory to tell his father and mother, and Marion, that Constance Norbury had promised to be his wife.

CHAPTER XV.

“They tell me, gentle lady, that they deck thee for a bride,
That the wreath is woven for thy hair, thy bridegroom at
thy side;
And I think I hear thy father’s sigh, thy mother’s calmer
tone,
As they give thee to another’s arms—their beautiful, their
own.
I never saw a bridal but my eye-lid hath been wet,
And it always seemed to me as though a joyous crowd were
met
To see the saddest sight of all, a gay and girlish thing
Lay aside her maiden gladness—for a name and for a ring.
And when I think how often I have seen thee with thy mild
And lovely look, and step of air, and bearing like a child,
Oh! how mournfully, how mournfully the thought comes
o’er my brain.
When I think thou ne’er may’st be that free and girlish
thing again.
But a voice is floating round me, and it tells me in my rest,
That sunshine shall illumine thy path, that joy shall be thy
guest.
That thy life shall be a summer’s day whose evening shall
go down
Like the evening in the Eastern clime that never knows a
frown.

When thy foot is at the altar, when the ring hath pressed
thy hand,
When those thou lov'st and those that love thee weeping
round thee stand,
O may the rhyme that friendship weaves like a spirit of the
air,
Be o'er thee at that moment for a blessing and a prayer."

FITZGERALD.

It is well that it is an established rule that the length of time during which an engagement should last rests wholly with the parents of the bride elect. The young people are always more or less disposed to hurry matters. Love in a cottage to them sounds poetical and not altogether unpleasant. The elders know that there is too often much truth in the proverb that "when poverty comes in at the door love flies out at the window." It is true that poverty would not have been the lot of Cecil and Constance, even if they had been permitted to have married at once. The only child of Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury would have a goodly portion. At the same time Sir Lionel felt strongly that it was most un-

desirable that the marriage should take place until Cecil could offer his bride a permanent home. He did not at all wish that his daughter should be thrown upon the wide world, and although Cecil had found in Mr. Chisholm a rector whom he thoroughly respected, and with whom he could work in entire harmony, yet Sir Lionel knew that, after all, his remaining at Silchester was dependent upon Mr. Chisholm's will, or at any rate on Mr. Chisholm's life. Lady Norbury was quite of the same mind with himself. As soon as ever Cecil was permanently established in an incumbency they would trust their daughter to his care, but until that was the case it was wholly out of the question. The advowson of Canondale belonged to Mr. Leighton, and he made no secret of the fact that he had left it to his son, but still Mr. Leighton was hearty and sound in health, and there was no prospect for Cecil of an early possession of the rectory. Cecil would not allow himself for a

moment to look upon that as a possible contingency. It would be dreadful that his marriage, the object of his fondest hopes, should be dependent upon his father's death, the object of his unfeigned deprecation. Nor could Cecil combat Sir Lionel's decision. He felt in his inmost heart that it was what he himself should do if he were in Sir Lionel's position. He must make up his mind to wait. He must feed upon the prospect of future happiness opening out before him, and rest satisfied for a time with the pleasures of anticipation. And indeed there was every reason why he should do so. There was at any rate no painful anxiety. No doubts disturbed his peace. Constance's word was pledged to him, and never for a moment did any distrust of her good faith cross his mind. Of course the waiting would be weary work for him. He longed heartily for the days of lodgings and red-faced servant maids to be gone, never to return. Still the path of duty was clear and that was a great

comfort. It would be but an ill return on his part for Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury's great confidence in him, and kindness to him, if for a moment he harboured the thought of attempting to persuade them to part with their daughter sooner than they thought prudent. So he made up his mind to work on at Silchester among the people committed to his charge, and to live in the hope of the way being ere long made plain for him.

For Constance it was much easier. Her feelings were mingled. True it was that she had given her heart to Cecil, but then she remembered that the joining of her lot to his involved the separation from her parents, and the very thought was agony to her. Hitherto she had been all in all to them, and they had been all in all to her, and the parting from them must necessarily cause a terrible wrench. Not for a moment did any doubt cross her mind as to her future happiness with Cecil, but it must be con-

fessed that she looked forward with dread to the time when she would have to leave her early home, and part from those whom she had loved so tenderly.

Matters went on thus for a considerable time. A year passed away and they seemed no nearer the goal of their hopes than they had been twelve months before. Cecil began to grow impatient, and it was in vain that Constance reminded him that they would never be likely to know beforehand when anything was going to be offered to him, but that any preferment was certain to come unexpectedly. Mr. Chisholm was very kind in letting him pay frequent visits to Canondale, but this served rather to increase his impatience than allay it, by showing him more and more what a prize he had won in Constance.

It was in the late autumn that one morning, just as they were finishing breakfast at the rectory, a note was brought in to Mr. Leighton. The address was in Lady Norbury's handwriting.

When he saw it he said across the table to his wife—

“Do you remember when I told you that I dreaded the very sight of Lady Norbury’s handwriting, for I knew almost by instinct that it generally foreboded something unpleasant? Now, how different it is! I have never experienced anything but kindness and the greatest consideration from her ever since that dear child’s illness. How little we thought at the time what an unspeakable blessing that would be to us all.”

He read Lady Norbury’s letter, and certainly from the expression of his face it did not seem as if there was anything in it of a disturbing character.

“What is it, Baldwin?” said Mrs. Leighton. “I can’t let you have any secrets with Lady Norbury.”

Mr. Leighton threw the note to his wife, saying as he did so to Marion—

“Lady Norbury wants me to go up to Oak-

wood at once. Sir Lionel has received a letter this morning which he hopes may lead the way to an opening for Cecil and Constance's marriage. Lady Norbury does not say what it is, or anything about it. I shall of course go up at once."

It was with a gladsome heart that he went to Oakwood. His visits there which in old times were paid as a matter of duty, and always dreaded, were now the greatest possible pleasure to him. Constance was already as his own daughter, and Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury were most courteous and kind.

The party had not yet left the breakfast room when he reached the park, so that he was at once shown into the room where they were all assembled.

"I know you are early at the rectory," said Sir Lionel, "so I suppose you have already breakfasted?"

"Yes, thank you," said Mr. Leighton, "but I thought it best to come up here at once on the

receipt of Lady Norbury's letter. I was of course very anxious to know all about it."

"Well, we have no secrets from Constance, so we may as well enter upon the matter at once. The fact is that I have this morning received a letter from the Bishop, most kindly saying that if I think the incumbency of Norton likely to suit Cecil, he will have much pleasure in offering it to him. It appears that Mr. Chisholm has written to the Bishop, quite unknown to me, giving the highest possible opinion of your son. He told the Bishop the circumstances of Cecil's case, and said that if any poorly endowed incumbency with a good house were to fall vacant, he thought Cecil would be admirably suited for it. It would be a great loss to himself, he said, to lose Cecil from Silchester, for he was everything he could wish in the parish, and he did not know what he should do without him, but, he added, it would indeed be hard if the very fact of his having worked so well were to hinder

him from obtaining preferment which he thoroughly deserved."

"Did Mr. Chisholm," interposed Mr. Leighton, "really write that without your knowing a word about it?"

"He did, indeed. The fact is that I have never applied to anybody for preferment for Cecil. I have a strong opinion that it is very undesirable to do so. I think these things are arranged for us better than we can arrange them for ourselves, and I hope the present instance will show that I have not been wrong in my opinion."

"But as to the place itself. Norton? Does the Bishop give you any particulars?"

"Yes. He tells us a little about it. It is an out-lying district near Shepperton. The population is about six hundred. The squire of the place has built church, schools, and an admirable parsonage, but the endowment is very small. The Bishop says that it is absolutely

necessary that whoever takes it should have fair private means of his own. The only reason why he wrote to me about it instead of to Cecil was because he wished to know from me whether in my opinion it was likely that he would accept it. Otherwise he said he would rather not offer it to him, as it would only unsettle him in his work at Silchester. The letter is marked 'strictly private and confidential,' but I am quite certain I am only doing what the Bishop would wish me to do in taking you into my confidence, as I know the news will not go beyond the rectory."

"You may depend upon that. Not a syllable shall pass our lips upon the subject. What does Constance say to it?"

Her father answered for her.

"Constance thinks that it would be a great pity that the matter should not be put before Cecil. She will not bias him in the least. He must go down to Norton and see whether he thinks the

place will suit him, and whether it is a parish in which he can hope to carry on his ministry efficiently. We cannot tell whether any other opening might occur or not, and as this matter has come before us without any seeking of our own, it would be wrong, she thinks, to reject it."

As all parties concerned were agreed, there was not much difficulty in the matter, and that night's post carried a letter from Sir Lionel to the Bishop, saying how grateful he was to him for his kindness and consideration, and that in his opinion Norton seemed a place very likely to suit Cecil Leighton. He was quite sure of this, that if the Bishop decided to offer the incumbency to him and he accepted it, no one in his lordship's diocese would do his duty more faithfully or zealously, or with a more earnest love for souls than he would. Not a word should be said by himself or any of his party until they heard from Silchester.

The day but one after, a carriage might have

been seen being driven rapidly up to Oakwood Park. Cecil sprang out of it and rang the bell—almost as though he would alarm the inmates of the house that a fire was raging which threatened their lives. The servant, an old and attached member of the household, came rapidly up, but was re-assured by Cecil's radiant face.

“You, is it, Mr. Leighton? I daresay you will be very welcome. You will find Miss Norbury in the library.”

It was as the servant had said. Cecil found Constance alone in the library. Of course she suspected the purport of his visit, and was not therefore so much surprised to see him as Cecil expected she would have been. It was not long before he had told her all; what a kind fatherly letter he had received that morning from the Bishop, offering him the incumbency of Norton. For his part he could not think how the Bishop knew anything about him, for since his ordination he had only seen him once at a confirmation.



But however that might be, there was no doubt about the offer. And he had thought that the best thing for him to do was to come off at once to Oakwood, to hear what Constance said and wished about it.

Then Constance told him of the Bishop's letter to her father; that she had known that the offer of Norton was to be made to him, and that so far all had been done with her father and mother's entire sanction. Before, however, he wrote a final answer to the Bishop, she thought it would be better that he should go down to Norton and judge for himself whether the place would suit them.

Cecil was almost disposed to think this unnecessary, but on reference being made to Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury, it was found that they were quite of the same opinion as Constance, and that Sir Lionel himself would accompany him down there. There would be plenty of time to reach Norton by an afternoon train.

Cecil just found time to go down to the rectory to tell his father and mother and Marion, of the bright prospects which, as he hoped, were now opening out before him, but he could not enter into many details, as the train, he said, left in half-an-hour. In point of fact Mr. Leighton knew as much about it as his son did.

Cecil urged his father to come with Sir Lionel and himself down to Norton, and Mr. Leighton gladly consented to do so.

“Mind, we shall expect all sorts of particulars, and a full description of the house and garden,” said Marion as they drove off for the station, where it had been arranged that Sir Lionel should meet them.

Shepperton station was about a mile from Norton. The surrounding country was certainly very picturesque. Norton itself lay near the summit of a hill sloping down towards a small stream, and the houses which formed the district seemed as if thrown about in order to avoid any

appearance of order or regularity. The parsonage—for it did not attain to the dignity of a rectory—was close to the church. The spire of the latter was a well-known landmark for many miles round. The house was not one of those architectural houses, which seem to be uncomfortable within in proportion as they are ornamental without; but a plain and comfortable red brick building resembling an old Manor-house. A short drive led up to the front door, and there was a good deal of ornamental ground about the house. At the bottom of the garden the gabled end of the school was seen through the shrubs. The whole party were much struck by the beauty of the situation, and the perfect arrangement of church, school, and parsonage. All were in turn inspected, and the utmost satisfaction expressed. There was some little doubt on their minds as to whether it would be well to call on the squire or not, but on the whole both Sir Lionel and Mr. Leighton

thought it would be better not to do so. The Bishop had not as yet received any letter of acceptance from Cecil, and it was very likely that he might wish himself to communicate the name of the future incumbent to the squire of Norton.

They returned to Canondale by an evening train. Mr. Leighton's feelings and Cecil's were of unmingled gratification. Sir Lionel could not help feeling rather sad. The acceptance of Norton made the parting with Constance a reality, and seemed to bring it terribly near. There could, however, be no doubt about it. Norton was a place well suited for Cecil, and there was nothing whatever to which he could make the slightest objection.

And so it was arranged between the parties most nearly concerned that the marriage should take place before the end of the year.

The interval was a very trying time for poor Lady Norbury. Constance never knew

how much it cost her to listen with a cheerful face to her own bright anticipations of future happiness. She kept her own feelings secret, but there was constantly a gnawing pain at her heart as though from the anticipation of a coming blow. It would almost be a relief, she felt, when it was really over. She had no doubt whatever about Cecil. Confidently could she trust her daughter's happiness to his care and keeping, but she hardly dared to look forward to the time when Constance would no longer call Oakwood home, but have her interests and pleasures associated with other scenes.

And now the time drew very close at hand. Cecil had left Silchester. His parting with Mr. Chisholm had been a real sorrow to him. He felt now that he was to work without a guide, and on his own responsibility, and he almost doubted his own ability to do so. However, the deed was done, and he trusted that strength

would be given to him sufficient to enable him to do his Master's work faithfully in the post to which his Bishop had appointed him. He was now living at the rectory for the last few days before the wedding, but his time was so divided between his old home and Oakwood that you could hardly tell of which house he was the inmate.

A wedding in the country is always a joyous occasion for those not immediately concerned in it. It is a very different thing from the fashionable London wedding. There all is cold, dreary, business-like, unsympathising. In the country, on the contrary, all is happy, pleasurable, congratulatory. It certainly was so at Canondale, when at last the day dawned on which Cecil and Constance were to be married. As eleven o'clock drew near—the hour fixed for the service being half-past eleven—groups of villagers might have been seen in holiday attire wending their way towards the church. Whether the

mothers thought that their babies would take much interest in the event which was about to take place it is impossible to say, but certain it is that many of them carried with them what might have been mistaken at a distance for a bundle of clothes, but which on a nearer inspection proved to be their latest born. Ever and anon an archway of evergreens and such flowers as could be procured at that season of the year spanned the roadway. The interest and sympathy evinced were unmistakable. Indeed it would have been most ungrateful on the part of the villagers if it had been otherwise. Sir Lionel and Lady Norbury had ever acted in the most liberal manner towards the parish, and of late—the inhabitants of the place had remarked it ever since Constance's illness—Lady Norbury's manner had become much more gentle and loving than it had been before. As for Constance herself, there was not one in the village—man, woman, or child—who did not worship the very

ground upon which she trod. They all thought "Mr. Cecil" most fortunate in having won her as his prize. And so from one cause or another the whole village seemed to be gathered together in and around Canondale Church on the eventful day of their marriage.

The party from the rectory were the first to arrive. Mr. Leighton was to perform the service, and quickly passed into the vestry. Cecil, after having kneeled for some time in prayer at the altar-rails, remained in the chancel prepared to receive his bride, looking happy and radiant.

At last she came, leaning upon her father's arm. She well became her bridal dress. Six bridesmaids followed her and took their places as her attendants in the chancel.

Then the service began. Solemnly and reverently did Mr. Leighton perform his part that day. He was rather pale and nervous at first, but that soon passed off as his thoughts became concentrated on the words he spoke.

"Cecil, wilt thou have this woman to thy

wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour her, and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will."

"Constance, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will."

And then ere long the words resounded through the church—

"Forasmuch as Cecil and Constance have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by joining of

hands ; I pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*"

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you ; the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you, and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. *Amen.*"

The deed was done. Cecil and Constance were man and wife. From that time forth no one could come between them, and when the service was ended, and they walked arm-in-arm through the church-yard, the school children on each side of the pathway strewing flowers for their carpet, Cecil felt that indeed God had been very gracious to him, and that his cup of happiness was full even to the brim.

"Constance," he said most earnestly, "God helping me, you shall never rue this day. I have sworn to love, honour and comfort you till death divides us, and faithfully will I perform my vow."

Constance looked up into his face and said—

“ I do not doubt you, Cecil. I, too, have made my promise. I also have sworn to love, honour, and keep you in sickness and in health, and God helping *me*, I will ever do as I have said.”

“ There is an awe in mortal's joy,
A deep mysterious fear,
Half of the heart will still employ,
As if we draw too near
To Eden's portal, and these fires
That bicker round in wavy spires,
Forbidding to our frail desires
What cost us once so dear.

“ We cower before th' heart-searching eye
In rapture as in pain ;
E'en wedded love, till Thou be nigh,
Dares not believe her gain ;
Then in the air she fearless springs,
The breath of heaven beneath her wings,
And leaves her wood-note wild, and sings
A tun'd and measured strain.

“ Ill fare the lay, though soft as dew
And free as air it fall,
That with their altar full in view,
Thy votaries would enthrall
To a foul dream, of heathen night,
Lifting her torch in love's despite,
And scaring with base wild-fire light
The sacred nuptial hall.

"Far other strains, far other fires
Our marriage offering grace;
Welcome all chaste and kind desires,
With even matron pace
Approaching down the hallow'd aisle!
Where should ye seek Love's perfect smile
But where your prayers were learn'd erewhile
In her own native place?

"Where but on His benigneſt brow
Who waits to bless you here?
Living He owned no nuptial vow
No bower to fancy dear:
Love's very ſelf—for Him no need
To nurse on earth the heavenly ſeed
Yet comfort in His eye we read
For bridal joy and fear.

"'Tis He who clasps the marriage band,
And fits the spousal ring,
Then leaves ye kneeling hand in hand,
Out of His stores to bring
His Father's dearest blessing shed
Of old on Israel's nuptial bed
Upon the board before ye spread
Of our all-bounteous King.

* * * * *

"Only kneel on, nor turn away
From the pure shrine where Christ to-day
Will store each flower ye duteous lay
For an eternal wreath."

"CHRISTIAN YEAR."

FINIS.







